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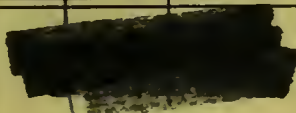
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# A STRANGE WORLD

A Nobel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET’

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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# A STRANGE WORLD



## CHAPTER I.

‘FAREWELL,’ QUOTH SHE, ‘AND COME AGAIN  
TO-MORROW.’

THE old housekeeper’s eyes were dim as she finished her story of the heir of Penwyn.

‘He was the best of all,’ she said ; ‘Mr. Balfour we saw very little of after he grew up, being the youngest to marry and leave home ; Mr. James was a kind, easy-going young fellow enough ; but Mr. George was everybody’s favourite, and there wasn’t a dry eye among us when the Squire called us together after his illness, and told us how his son had died. “He died like a gentleman—upholding the honour of his Queen and his country, and the name of Penwyn,” said the master, without a tremble in his voice, though it was feebler than before the

stroke, "and I am proud to think of him lying in his far-off grave, and if I were not so old I would go over the sea to kneel beside my poor boy's resting-place before I die. He displeased me once, but we are good friends now, and there will be no cloud between us when we meet in another world."'

Here Mrs. Darvis was fairly overcome, much to the astonishment of the girl Elspeth, whose uncanny black eyes regarded her with a scornful wonder. Maurice noticed that look.

'Sweet child,' he said to himself. 'What a charming helpmeet you will make for some honest peasant in days to come, with your amiable disposition !

He had taken his time looking at the old house, and listening to the housekeeper's story. The sun was low, and he had yet to find a lodging for the night. He had walked far since morning, and was not disposed to retrace his steps to the nearest town, a place called Seacomb, consisting of a long straggling street, with various lateral courts and alleys, a market-place, parish church, lock-up, and five dissenting chapels of various denominations. This Seacomb was a good nine miles from Penwyn Manor.



‘Perhaps you’d like to see the young Squire’s portrait,’ said Mrs. Darvis, when she had dried those tributary tears.

‘The young Squire?’

‘Mr. George. We used to call him the young Squire sometimes.’

‘Yes, I should like to have a look at the poor fellow, now you’ve told me his history.’

‘It hangs in the old Squire’s study. It’s a bit of a room, and I forgot to show it to you just now.’

Maurice followed her across the hall to a small door in a corner, deeply recessed and low, but solid enough to have guarded the Tolbooth, one would suppose. It opened into a narrow room, with one window looking towards the sea. The wainscot was almost black with age, the furniture, old walnut wood, of the same time-darkened hue. There was a heavy old bureau, brass handled and brass clamped; a bookcase, a ponderous writing desk, and one capacious arm-chair, covered with black leather. The high, narrow chimney-piece was in an angle of the room, and above this hung the portrait of George Penwyn.

It was a kit-kat picture of a lad in undress uniform, the face a long oval, fair of complexion, and somewhat feminine in delicacy of feature, the eyes dark blue. The rest of the features, though sufficiently regular, were commonplace enough; but the eyes, beautiful alike in shape and colour, impressed Maurice Clissold. They were eyes which might have haunted the fancy of girlhood, with the dream of an ideal lover; eyes in whose somewhat melancholy sweetness a poet would have read some strange life-history. The hair, a pale auburn, hung in a loosely waving mass over the high narrow brow, and helped to give a picturesque cast to the patrician-looking head.

‘A nice face,’ said Maurice, critically. ‘There is a little look of my poor friend James Penwyn, but not much. Poor Jim had a gayer, brighter expression, and had not those fine blue-grey eyes. I fancy Churchill Penwyn must be a plain likeness of his uncle George. Not so handsome, but more intellectual-looking.’

‘Yes, sir,’ assented Mrs. Darvis. ‘The present Squire is something like his uncle, but there’s a



harder look in his face. All the features seem cut out sharper ; and then his eyes are quite different. Mr. George had his mother’s eyes ; she was a Trevillian, and one of the handsomest women in Cornwall.’

‘I’ve seen a face somewhere which that picture reminds me of, but I haven’t the faintest notion where,’ said Maurice. ‘In another picture, perhaps. Half one’s memories of faces are derived from pictures, and they flash across the mind suddenly, like a recollection of another world. However, I mustn’t stand prosing here, while the sun goes down yonder. I have to find a lodging before nightfall. What is the nearest place, village, or farmhouse, where I can get a bed, do you think, Mrs. Darvis ?’

‘There’s the “Bell,” in Penwyn village.’

‘No good. I’ve tried there already. The landlady’s married daughter is home on a visit, and they haven’t a bed to give me for love or money.’

Mrs. Darvis lapsed into meditation.

‘The nearest farmhouse is Trevanard’s, at Borcel End. They might give you a bed there, for the place

is large enough for a barrack, but they are not the most obliging people in the world, and they are too well off to care about the money you may pay them for the accommodation.

‘How far is Borcel End?’

‘Between two and three miles.’

‘Then I’ll try my luck there, Mrs. Darvis,’ said Maurice, cheerily. ‘It lies between that and sleeping under the open sky.’

‘I wish I could offer you a bed, sir; but in my position——’

‘As custodian such an offer would be a breach of good faith to your employers. I quite understand that, Mrs. Darvis. I come here as a stranger to you, and I thank you kindly for having been so obliging as to show me the house.’

He dropped a couple of half-crowns into her hand as he spoke, but these Mrs. Darvis rejected most decidedly.

‘Ours has never been what you can call a show place, sir, and I’ve never looked for that kind of perquisite.’

‘Come, young ’one,’ said Maurice, after taking

leave of the friendly old housekeeper, ‘you can put me into the right road to Borcel End, and you shall have one of these for your reward.’

Elspeth’s black eyes had watched the rejection of the half-crowns with unmistakable greed. Her sharp face brightened at Maurice’s promise.

‘I’ll show you the way, sir,’ she said; ‘I know every step of it.’

‘Yes, the lass is always roaming about, like a wild creature, over the hills, and down by the sea,’ said Mrs. Darvis, with a disapproving air. ‘I don’t think she knows how to read or write, or has as much Christian knowledge as the old jackdaw in the servants’ hall.’

‘I know things that are better than reading and writing,’ said Elspeth, with a grin.

‘What kind of things may those be?’ asked Maurice.

‘Things that other people don’t know.’

‘Well, my lass, I won’t trouble you by sounding the obscure depths of your wisdom. I only want the straightest road to Trevanard’s farm. He is a tenant of this estate, I suppose, Mrs. Darvis?’

‘Yes, sir. Michael Trevanard’s father was a tenant of the old Squire’s before my time. Old Mrs. Trevanard is still living, though stone-blind, and hardly right in her head, I believe.’

They had reached the lobby door by this time, the chief hall door being kept religiously bolted and barred during the absence of the family.

‘I shall come and see you again, Mrs. Darvis, most likely, before I leave this part of the country,’ said Maurice, as he crossed the threshold. ‘Good evening.’

‘You’ll be welcome at any time, sir. Good evening.’

Elspeth led the way across the lawn, with a step so light and swift that it was as much as Maurice could do to keep pace with her, tired as he was, after a long day afoot. He followed her into the pine wood. The trees were not thickly planted, but they were old and fine, and their dense foliage looked inky black against a primrose-coloured sky. A narrow footpath wound among the tall black trunks, only a few yards from the edge of the cliff, which was poorly guarded by a roughly fashioned timber



railing, the stakes wide apart. The vast Atlantic lay below them, a translucent green in the clear evening light, melting into purple far away on the horizon.

Maurice paused to look back at Penwyn Manor House, the grave, substantial old dwelling-house which had seen so little change since the days of the Tudors. High gable ends, latticed windows gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun; stone walls moss-darkened and ivy-shrouded, massive porch, with deep recesses, and roomy enough for a small congregation; mighty chimney-stacks, and quaint old iron weathercock, with a marvellous specimen of the ornithological race pointing its gilded beak due west.

‘Poor old James! what good days we might have had here!’ sighed Maurice, as he looked back at the fair domain. It seemed a place saved out of the good old world, and was very pleasant to contemplate after the gimcrack palaces of the age we live in—in which all that architecture can conjure from the splendour of the past is more or less disfigured by the tinsel of the present.

‘Dear old James, to think that he wanted to marry that poor little actress girl, and bring her to reign down here, in the glow and glory of those stained-glass windows—gorgeous with the armorial devices of a line of county families! Innocent, simple-hearted lad! wandering about like a prince in a fairy tale, ready to fall in love with the first pretty girl he saw by the roadside, and to take her back to his kingdom.’

‘If you want to see Trévanard’s farm before dark you must come on, sir,’ said Elspeth.

Maurice took the hint, and followed at his briskest pace. They were soon out of the pine grove, which they left by a little wooden gate, and on the wild wide hills, where the distant sheep-bell had an eerie sound in the still evening air.

Even the gables of the Manor House disappeared presently as they went down a dip in the hills. Far off in a green hollow, Maurice saw some white buildings—scattered untidily near a patch of water, which reflected the saffron-hued evening sky.

‘That’s Trevanard’s,’ said Elspeth, pointing to this spot.

‘I thought as much,’ said Maurice, ‘then you need go no further. You’ve fairly earned your fee.’

He gave her the half-crown. The girl turned the coin over with a delighted look before she put it in her pocket.

‘I’ll go to Borcel End with you,’ she said. ‘I’d as lief be on the hills as at home—sooner, for grandmother is not over-pleasant company.’

‘But you’d better go back now, my girl, or it’ll be dark long before you reach home.’

Elsbeth laughed, a queer impish cachination, which made Maurice feel rather uncomfortable.

‘You don’t suppose I’m afraid of the dark,’ she said, in her shrill young voice, so young and yet so old in tone. ‘I know every star in the sky. Besides, it’s never dark at this time of year. I’ll go on to Borcel End with you. May be you mayn’t get accommodated there, and then I can show you a near way across the hills to Penwyn village. You might get shelter at one of the cottages anyhow.’

‘Upon my word you are very obliging,’ said Maurice, surprised by this show of benevolence upon the damsel’s part.

‘Do you know anything about this Borcel End?’ he asked, presently, when they were going down into the valley.

‘I’ve never been inside it,’ answered Elspeth, glibly, more communicative now than she had been an hour or two ago, when Churchill questioned her about the house of Penwyn. ‘Mrs. Trevanard isn’t one to encourage a poor girl like me about her place. She’s a rare hard one, they say, and would pinch and scrape for a sixpence; yet dresses fine on Sundays, and lives well. There’s always good eating and drinking at Borcel End, folks say. I’ve heard tell as it was a gentleman’s house once, before old Squire Penwyn bought it, and that there was a fine park round the house. There’s plenty of trees now, and a garden that has all gone to ruin. The gentleman that owned Borcel spent all his money, people say, and old Squire Penwyn bought the place cheap, and turned it into a farm, and it’s been in the hands of the Trevanards ever since, and they’re rich.



enough to buy the place three times over, people say, if Squire Penwyn would sell it.’

‘I don’t suppose I shall get a very warm welcome if this Mrs. Trevanard is such a disagreeable person,’ said Maurice, beginning to feel doubtful as to the wisdom of asking hospitality at Borcel End.

‘Oh, I don’t know about that. She’s civil enough to gentlefolks, I’ve heard say. It’s only her servants and such like she’s so stiff with. You can but try.’

They were at the farm by this time. The old house stood before them—a broad stretch of green-sward in front of it, with a pool of blackish-looking water in the middle, on which several broods of juvenile ducks were swimming gaily.

The house was large, the walls rough-cast, with massive timber framework. There was a roomy central porch, also of plaster and timber, and this and a projecting wing at each end of the house gave a certain importance to the building. Some relics of its ancient gentility still remained, to show that Borcel End had not always been the house of a

tenant farmer. A coat of arms, roughly cut on a stone tablet over the front door, testified to its former owner's pride of birth; and the quadrangular range of stables, stone-built, and more important than the house, indicated those sporting tastes which might have helped to dissipate the fortunes of a banished and half-forgotten race. But Borcel End, in its brightest day, had never been such a mansion as the old Tudor Manor House of Penwyn. There was a homeliness in the architecture which aspired to neither dignity nor beauty. Low ceilings, square latticed windows, dormers in the roof, and heavy chimney-stacks. The only beauty which the place could have possessed at its best was the charm of rusticity—an honest, simple English home. To-day, however, Borcel End was no longer at its best. The stone quadrangle, where the finest stud of hunters in the county had been lodged, was now a straw-yard for cattle; one side of the house was overshadowed by a huge barn, built out of the *débris* of the park wall; a colony of jovial pigs disported themselves in a small enclosure which had once been a maze. A remnant of hedgerow, densest yew, still marked

the boundary of this ancient pleasance, but all the rest had vanished beneath the cloven hoof of the unclean animal.

Though the farmyard showed on every side the tokens of agricultural prosperity, the house itself had a neglected air. The plaster walls, green and weather-stained, presented the curious blended hues of a Stilton cheese in prime condition, the timber seemed perishing for want of a good coat of paint. Poultry were pecking about close under the latticed windows, and even in the porch, and a vagabond pigling was thrusting his black nose in among the roots of one solitary rose bush which still lingered on the barren turf. Borcel End, seen in this fading light, was hardly a homestead to attract the traveller.

‘I don’t think much of your Borcel End,’ said Maurice, with a disparaging air. ‘However, here goes for a fair trial of west-country hospitality.’

## CHAPTER II.

‘O’ER ALL THERE HUNG A SHADOW AND A FEAR.’

MR. CLISSOLD entered the porch, scattering the affrighted fowls right and left. As they sped cackling away, the house door, which had stood ajar, was opened wider by a middle-aged woman, who looked at the intruder frowningly. ‘We never buy anything of pedlars,’ she said, sharply. ‘It’s no use coming here.’

‘I’m not a pedlar, and I haven’t anything to sell. I am going through Cornwall on a walking tour, and want to find a place where I could stop for a week or so, and look about the country. I am prepared to pay a fair price for a clean homely lodging. The housekeeper at Penwyn Manor told me to try here.’

‘Then she sent you on a fool’s errand,’ replied the woman; ‘we don’t take lodgers.’



‘Not as a rule perhaps, but you might strain a point in my favour, I dare say.’

Maurice Clissold had a pleasant voice and a pleasant smile. Mrs. Trevanard looked at him doubtfully, softened in spite of herself by his manner. And then no Trevanard was ever above earning an honest penny. They had not grown rich by refusing chances of small profits.

‘Come, mother,’ cried a cheery voice from within, while she was hesitating, ‘you can ask the gentleman to come in and sit down a bit, anyhow. That won’t make us nor break us.’

‘You can walk in and sit down, sir, if you like,’ said Mrs. Trevanard, with a somewhat unwilling air.

Maurice crossed the threshold, and found himself in a large stone-paved room, which had once been the hall, and was now the living room. The staircase, with its clumsy, black-painted balustrades, shaped like gouty legs, occupied one side of the room; on the other yawned the mighty chimney, with a settle on each side of the wide hearth, a cosy retreat on winter’s nights. The glow of the

fire had a comfortable look even on this midsummer evening.

A young man — tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking, clad in a suit of velveteen which gave him something the air of a gamekeeper—stood near the hearth cleaning a gun. He it was who had spoken just now—Martin Trevanard, the only son of the house, and about the only living creature who had any influence with his mother. Pride ruled her, religion, or bigotry, had power over her, gold was the strongest influence of all. But of all the mass of humanity there was but one unit she cared for besides herself, and that one was Martin.

‘Sit down and make yourself at home, sir,’ said the young man, heartily. ‘You’ve walked far, I dare say.’

‘I have,’ answered Maurice, ‘but I don’t want to rest anywhere until I am sure that I can get a night’s shelter. There was no room for me at the “Bell” at Penwyn, but I left my knapsack there, thinking I should be forced to go back to the village anyhow. It was an afterthought coming on here. Oh, by the way, there’s a girl outside, the lodge-

keeper’s daughter, who has been my guide so far, and wants to know my fate before she goes home. What can you do with me, Mrs. Trevanard? I’m not particular. Give me a truss of clean hay in one of your barns, if you’re afraid to have me in the house.’

‘Don’t be ill-natured, old lady,’ said the young man, ‘the gentleman is a gentleman. One can see that with half an eye.’

‘That’s all very well, Martin; but what will your father say to our taking in a stranger, without so much as knowing his name?’

‘My name is Clissold,’ said the applicant, taking a card out of his pocket-book and throwing it on the polished beechwood table, the only handsome piece of furniture in the room. A massive oblong table, big enough for twelve or fourteen people to sit at. ‘There are my name and address. And so far as payment in advance goes,’—he put a sovereign down beside the card—‘there’s for my night’s accommodation and refreshment.’

‘Put your money in your pocket, sir. You’re a friend of Mr. Penwyn’s, I suppose?’ asked Mrs. Trevanard, still doubtful.

‘I know the present Mr. Penwyn, but I cannot call myself his friend. The poor young fellow who was murdered, James Penwyn, was my nearest and dearest friend, my adopted brother.’

‘Let the gentleman stop, mother. We’ve rooms enough, and to spare, in this gloomy old barrack. A fresh face always brightens us up a little, and it’s nice to hear how the world goes on. Father’s always satisfied when you are. You can put the gentleman in that old room at the end of the corridor. You needn’t be frightened, sir, there are no ghosts at Borcel End,’ added Martin Trevanard, laughing.

His mother still hesitated—but after a pause she said, ‘Very well, sir. You can stop to-night, and as long as you please afterwards at a fair price—say a guinea a week for eating, drinking, and sleeping, and a trifle for the servant when you go away.’

Even in consenting the woman seemed to have a lingering reluctance, as if she were giving assent to something which she felt should have been refused.

‘Your terms are moderation itself, madam, and I thank you. I’ll send away my small guide.’



He went out to the porch where Elspeth sat waiting—no doubt a listener to the conversation. Maurice rewarded her devotion with an extra sixpence, and dismissed her. Away she sped through the gathering gloom, light of foot as a young fawn. Maurice felt considerably relieved by the comfortable adjustment of the lodging question. He seated himself in an arm-chair by the hearth, and stretched out his legs in the ruddy glow, with a blissful sense of repose.

‘Is there such a thing as a lad about the place who would go to the “Bell” at Penwyn to fetch my knapsack for a consideration?’ he asked.

There was a cowboy who would perform that service, it seemed. Martin went out himself to look for the rustic Mercury.

‘He’s a good-natured lad, my son,’ said Mrs. Trevanard, ‘but full of fancies. That comes of idleness, and too much education, his father says. His grandmother yonder never learned to read or write, and ’twas she and her husband made Borcel End what it is.’

Following the turn of Mrs. Trevanard’s head,

Maurice perceived that an object which in the obscurity of the room he had taken for a piece of furniture was in reality a piece of humanity—a very old woman, dressed in dark garments, with only a narrow white border peeping from under a cowl-shaped black silk cap, a dingy red handkerchief pinned across her shoulders, and two bony hands, whose shrivelled fingers moved with a mechanical regularity in the process of stocking knitting.

‘Ay,’ said a quivering voice. ‘I can’t read or write—that’s to say I couldn’t even when I had my sight—but between us, Michael and I made Borcel what it is. Young people don’t understand the old ways—they have servants to wait upon ’em, and play the harpsichord—but little good comes of it.’

‘Is she blind?’ asked Maurice of the younger Mrs. Trevanard, in a whisper.

The old woman’s quick ear caught the question.

‘Stone blind, sir, for the last eighteen years. But the Lord has been good to me. I’ve a comfortable home and kind children, and they don’t

turn me out of doors, though I’m such a useless creature.’

A gloomy figure in that dark corner beyond the glow of the fire. Maurice felt that the room was less comfortable somehow, since he had discovered the presence of this old woman, with her sightless orbs, and never-resting fingers, long and lean, weaving her endless web, gloomy as Clotho herself.

A plump, ruddy-cheeked maid-servant came bustling in with preparations for supper, making an agreeable diversion after this sad little episode. She lighted a pair of tall tallow candles in tall brass candlesticks, which feebly illumined the large low room. The wainscoted walls were blackened by smoke and time, and from the cross-beams that sustained the low ceiling hung a grove of hams, while flitches of bacon adorned the corners, where there was less need of headway. Every object in the room belonged to the useful rather than the beautiful. Yet there was something pleasant to Maurice’s unaccustomed eye in the homely old-world comfort of the place.

He took advantage of the light to steal a glance

at the face of his hostess, as she helped the servant to lay the cloth and place the viands on the table. Bridget Trevanard was about fifty years of age, but there were few wrinkles on the square brow, or about the eyes and mouth. She was tall, buxom, and broad-shouldered; a woman who looked as if she had few feminine weaknesses, either moral or physical. The muscular arm and broad open chest betokened an almost virile strength. Her skin was bright and clear, her nose broad and thick, but fairly modelled of its kind, her under lip full, and firm as if wrought in iron, the upper lip long, straight, and thin. Her eyes were dark brown, bright and hard, with that sharp penetrating look which is popularly supposed to see through deal boards, and even stone walls on occasion. So at least thought the servants at Borcel End.

A model farmer's wife, this Mrs. Trevanard, a severe mistress, yet not unjust or unkind, a proud woman, and in her own particular creed something of a zealot. A woman who loved money, not so much for its own sake, as because it served the only ambition she had ever cherished, namely, to be more



respectable than her neighbours. Wealth went a long way towards this superior respectability, therefore did Mrs. Trevanard toil and spin, and never cease from labour in the pursuit of gain. She was the motive power of Borcel End. Her superlative energy kept Michael Trevanard, a somewhat lazy man by nature, a patient slave at the mill. Martin was the only creature at Borcel who escaped her influence. For him life meant the indulgence of his own fancies, with just so much work as gave him an appetite for his meals. He would drive the waggon to the mill, or superintend the men at hay-making and harvest. He rather liked attending market, and was a good hand at a bargain, but to the patient drudgery of every-day cares young Trevanard had a rooted objection. He was good-looking, good-natured, walked well, sang well, whistled better than any other man in the district, and was a general favourite. People said that the good blood of the old Trevanards showed in young Martin.

### CHAPTER III.

‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.

WHEN the supper-table was ready, the servant girl ran to the porch and rang a large bell, which was kept under one of the benches—a bell that pealed out shrilly over the silent fields. This summons brought home Michael Trevanard, who appeared in about five minutes, pulling down his shirt-sleeves, and carrying his coat over his arm, while some stray wisps of hay which hung about his hair and clothes indicated that he had but that moment left the yard where they were building a huge stack, which Maurice had seen looming large through the dusk as he approached Borcel.

‘We’ve stacked the fourteen acre piece, mother,’ said the farmer, as he pulled on his coat, ‘and a fine stack it is, too, as sweet as a hazel nut. No fear of

mildew this year. And now I’ll give myself a wash——’

He stopped, surprised at beholding a stranger standing by his hearth. Maurice had risen to receive the master of the house.

Martin explained the traveller’s presence.

‘We’ve taken to lodging-letting since you’ve been out, father,’ he said, in his easy way. ‘This gentleman wants to stay here and to look about the country round for a few days, and as mother thought he’d be company for me, and knew you wouldn’t have any objection, she said yes. Mr. Clissold, that’s the gentleman’s name, is a friend of the family up yonder.’ An upward jerk of Martin’s head indicated the Manor House.

‘Any friend of the Squire’s, or any one your mother thinks proper to accommodate, my lad, she’s missus here,’ answered Mr. Trevanard. ‘You’re kindly welcome, sir.’

The farmer went out to some back region, whence was immediately heard an energetic pumping and splashing, and a noise as of a horse being rubbed down, after which Mr. Trevanard reappeared, lobster-

like of complexion, and breathing hard after his rapid exertions.

He was a fine-looking man, with a face which might fairly be supposed to show the blood of the Trevanards, for the features were of a patrician type, and the broad open brow inspired at once respect and confidence. That candid countenance belonged to a man too incapable of deceit to be capable of suspicion; a man whom an artful child might cheat with impunity, a man who could never have grown rich unaided.

Mr. and Mrs. Trevanard, their son, and their guest, sat down to supper without delay; but the old blind mother still kept her seat in the shadowy corner, and eat her supper apart. It consisted only of a basin of broth, sprinkled with chopped parsley, which the old woman sipped slowly, while the rest were eating their substantial meal.

Maurice had eaten nothing since noon, and did ample justice to the lordly round of corned beef, and home-cured chine, the freshly gathered lettuces, and even the gooseberry pie and clotted cream. He and Martin talked all supper-time, while the house-



mother carved, and the farmer abandoned himself to the pleasures of the table, and drank strong cider with easy enjoyment after the toilsome day.

‘There’s no place like a hay-field for making a man thirsty,’ he said, by way of apology, after one of his deep draughts ; ‘and I can’t drink the cat-lap mother sends to the men.’

Martin talked of field sports and boating. He had a little craft of his own, four or five tons burden, and was passionately fond of the water. By and by the conversation drifted round to the Squire of Penwyn.

‘He rides well,’ said Martin, ‘but I don’t believe he’s over-fond of hunting, though he subscribes handsomely to the hounds. I never knew such a fellow for doing everything liberally. He’s bound to be popular, for he’s the best master they ever had at the Manor.’

‘And is he popular?’ asked Maurice.

‘Well, I hardly know what to say about that. I only know that he ought to be. People are so hard to please. There are some say they liked the old Squire best, though he wasn’t half so generous, and

didn't keep any company worth speaking of. He had a knack of talking to people and making himself one of them that went a long way. And then some people remember Mr. George, and seem to have a notion that this man is an interloper. He oughtn't to have come into the property, they say. Providence never could have meant the son of the youngest son to have Penwyn. They're as full of fancies as an egg is full of meat in our parts.'

'So it seems. Mrs. Penwyn is liked, I suppose?'

'Yes, she made friends with the poor people in no time. And then she's a great beauty ; people go miles to see her when she rides to covert with her husband. There's a sister, too, still prettier to my mind.'

Martin promised to show his new friend all that was worth seeing for twenty miles round Borcel. He would have the dog-cart ready early next morning, directly after breakfast, in fact, and six o'clock was breakfast-time at the farm. Maurice was delighted with the friendly young fellow, and thought that he had stumbled upon a very agreeable household.

Mrs. Trevanard was somewhat stern and repellent in manner, no doubt, but she was not absolutely uncivil, and Mr. Clissold felt that he should be able to get on with her pretty well.

She had said grace before meat, and she stopped the two young men in their talk presently, and offered a thanksgiving after the meal. It was a long grace, Methodistical in tone, with an allusion to Esau’s mess of pottage, which was brought in as a dreadful example of gluttony.

After this ceremonial Mrs. Trevanard went upstairs to superintend the preparation of the stranger’s apartment. The grandmother vanished at the same time, spirited away by the serving wench, who led her out by a little door that opened near her corner, and the three men drew round the hearth, lighted their pipes, and smoked and talked in a very friendly fashion for the next half-hour or so. They were talking merrily enough when Mrs. Trevanard came downstairs again, candle in hand. She had taken out one of the old silver candlesticks which had been part of her dower, in order to impress the visitor with a proper notion of her respectability.

‘Your room’s ready, Mr. Clissold,’ she said, ‘and here’s your bedroom candle.’

Maurice took the hint, and bade his new friends good night. He followed Mrs. Trevanard up the broad, bulky old staircase, and to the end of a corridor. The room into which she led him was large, and had once been handsome, but some barbarian had painted the oak paneling pink, and the wood carving over the fireplace had been defaced by the industrious knives of several generations of schoolboys; there was a good deal of broken glass in the lattices, and a general air of dilapidation. A fire burned briskly in the wide basket-shaped grate, and, though it brightened the room, made these traces of decay all the more visible.

‘It’s a room we never use,’ said Mrs. Trevanard, ‘so we haven’t cared to spend money upon it. There’s always enough money wanted for repairs, and we haven’t need to waste any upon fanciful improvements. The place is dry enough, for I take care to open the windows on sunny days, and there’s nothing better than air and sun to keep a room dry. I had the fire lighted to-night for cheerfulness’ sake.’



‘You are very kind,’ replied Maurice, pleased to see his knapsack on a chair by the bed, ‘and the room will do admirably. It looks the pink of cleanliness.’

‘I don’t harbour dirt, even in unused rooms,’ answered Mrs. Trevanard. ‘It needs a mistress’s eye to keep away cobwebs and vermin, but I’ve never spared myself trouble that way. Good night, sir.’

‘Good night, Mrs. Trevanard. By the way, you’ve no ghosts here, I think your son said?’

‘I hope both you and he know better than to believe any such rubbish, sir.’

‘Of course; only this room looks the very picture of a haunted chamber, and if I were capable of believing in ghosts I should certainly lie awake on the look-out for one to-night.’

‘Those whose faith is surely grounded have no such fancies, sir,’ replied Mrs. Trevanard, severely, and closed the door without another word.

‘The room looks haunted, for all that,’ muttered Maurice, and then involuntarily repeated those famous lines of Hood’s,—



‘ O’er all there hung a shadow and a fear ;  
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,  
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,  
The place is haunted !’

The bedstead was a four-poster, with tall, spirally twisted posts, and some dark drapery, shrunken with age, and too small for the wooden framework. There was an old-fashioned press, or wardrobe, of black wood, whose polished surface reflected the firelight. A three-cornered wash-hand stand, and a clumsy-looking chest of drawers between the windows, surmounted by a cracked looking-glass, completed the furniture of the room. The boards were uncarpeted, and showed knots and dark patches in the worm-eaten wood, which a morbid fancy might have taken for the traces of some half-forgotten murder.

‘ Not a cheerful-looking ’ room by any means, even with the aid of that blazing fire,’ thought Maurice.

He opened one of the casements and looked out. The night air was soft and balmy, perfumed with odours of clover and the newly stacked hay. The Atlantic lay before him, shining under the great red moon, which had but just risen. A pleasanter pros-

pect this than the bare walls of faded, dirty pink, the black clothes-press, and funereal four-poster.

Maurice lingered at the window, his arms folded on the broad ledge, his thoughts wandering idly—wandering back to last year and the moonlight that had shone upon the cathedral towers of Eborsham, the garden of the ‘ Waterfowl ’ Inn, and the winding river.

‘ Poor James ! ’ he mused, ‘ how happy that light-hearted fellow might have been at Penwyn Manor ! —how happy, and how popular ! He would have had the knack of pleasing people, with that frank, easy kindness of his, and would have made friends of half the county. And if he had married that actress girl ? A folly, no doubt ; but who knows if all might not have ended happily ? There was nothing vulgar or low about that girl—indeed, she had the air of one of Nature’s gentlewomen. It would have been a little difficult for her to learn all the duties of a *châtelaine*, perhaps—how to order a dinner, and whom to invite—the laws of precedence—the science of morning calls. But if James loved her, and chose

her from all other women for his wife, why should he not have been happy with her? I was a fool to oppose his fancy, still more a fool for leaving him. He might be alive now, perhaps, but for that wild-goose journey of mine.'

Here his thoughts took another turn. They went back to that train of circumstances which had brought about his absence from Eborsham on the night of James Penwyn's murder.

It was past midnight when Maurice Clissold roused himself from that long reverie, and prepared for peaceful slumber in the funereal bed. His fire had burned low by this time, and the red glow of the expiring embers was drowned in the full splendour of the risen moon, whose light silvered the bare boards, and brought into strong relief those stains and blotches upon the wood which looked so like the traces of ancient murder. The bed was luxurious, for there was no stint of feathers at Borcel End; yet Maurice wooed the god of sleep in vain. He began to think that there must be some plumage of game birds mingled with the stuffing of his couch, and that, soft and deep as it was, this was one of those

beds upon which a man could neither sleep nor die comfortably.

‘I ought to be tired enough to sleep on a harder bed than this, considering the miles I’ve walked to-day,’ he thought.

It may have been that he was over-tired, or it may have been that flood of silver light streaming through the diamond-panes of yonder lattice. Whatever might be the reason of his restlessness, sleep came not to straighten his unquiet limbs, or to steep his wandering thoughts in her cool waters of forgetfulness.

He heard a distant clock—in the hall where he had supped, most likely—strike two, and just at this time a gentle drowsiness began to steal over him. He was just falling deep down into some sleepy hollow, soft as a bed of poppies, when his door was opened by a cautious hand, and a light footstep sounded on the floor. He was wide awake in a minute, and without moving from his recumbent position, drew the dark curtain back a little way and looked towards the door. The shadow of the curtain fell upon him as he lay, and the bedstead looked unoccupied.



‘The ghost!’ he said to himself, with rather an awful feeling. ‘I knew there must be one in such a room—or perhaps the house is on fire, and some one has come to warn me.’

No ; that wanderer through the deep of night had evidently no business with Mr. Clissold—nay, was unconscious of, or indifferent to, the fact of his existence. The figure slowly crossed the floor, with a light step, but a little sliding noise, as of a foot ill-shod—a slipper down at heel.

It came full into the moonlight presently, between the bedstead and the two windows.

‘Ay, verily a ghost,’ thought Maurice, with a feeling like ice-cold water circulating slowly through every artery in his body.

Never had he seen, or conceived within his mind, a figure more spectral, yet with a certain wild beauty in its ghastliness. He raised himself in his bed, still keeping well within the shadow of the curtains, and watched the spectre with eyes which seemed endowed with a double power of vision in the thrilling intensity of that moment.

The spectre was a woman’s form ; tall, slender—



may, so wasted that it seemed almost unnaturally tall. The face was death-pale in that solemn light, the eyes large and dark, the hair ebon-black and falling in long loose masses over the white garment, whose folds were straight as those of a winding-sheet. So might the dead, risen from a new-made grave, have looked.

The figure went straight to one of the casements—that furthest from the bed, and at right angles with it—unfastened the hasp, and flung the window wide open. She drew a chair close to the open window, and kneeled upon it, resting her arms on the sill, and leaning out of the window, as if watching for some one to come, thought Maurice, that frozen blood of his beginning to thaw a little.

‘Those actions seem too deliberate and real for a ghost,’ he told himself. ‘Phantoms must surely be soundless. Now I heard the slipshod feet upon the floor. I heard the scrooping of the chair. I can see a gentle heaving of the breast under that shroud-like garment. Ergo my visitor is not a ghost. Who can she be? Not Mrs. Trevanard assuredly,

nor the old blind grandmother, nor the buxom lass who waited on us at supper. I thought those were all the women kind in the house.

A heavy sigh from that unearthly-looking intruder startled him, a sigh so long, so full of anguish, so like the utterance of some lost soul in pain ! Difficult not to yield to superstitious fear as he gazed at that kneeling figure, with its long dark hair, and delicate profile, sharply outlined against the black shadow of the deep-sunk casement.

Again came the sigh, despairing, desolate.

‘Oh, my love, my love, why don’t you come back to me ?’

The words broke like a cry of despair from those pale lips. Not loud was the sorrowful appeal, but so full of pain that it touched the listener’s heart more deeply than the most passionate burst of louder grief could have done.

‘Dear love, you promised, you promised me. How could I have lived if I had not thought you would come back ?’

Then the tone changed. She was no longer

appealing to another, but talking to herself, hurriedly, breathlessly, with ever increasing agitation.

‘Why not to-night? Why shouldn’t he come back to-night? He was always fond of moonlight nights. He promised to be true to me, and stand by me, come what might. No harm should ever come to me. He swore that, swore it with his arms round me, his eyes looking into mine. No man could be false, and yet look as he looked, and speak as he spoke.’

Silence for a brief space, and then a sudden cry—a sharp anguish-stricken cry, as of a broken heart.

‘Who said he was dead and gone, dead and gone years ago? The world wouldn’t look as bright as it does if he were dead. He loved the moonlight. Could you shine, false moon, if he were dead?’ Again a pause, and then a slower, more thoughtful tone, as if doubts disturbed that demented brain. ‘Was it last year he used to come, last year when we were so happy together—last year when——’

A sudden burst of tears interrupted the sentence.

The woman's face fell forward on her folded arms, and the frail body was shaken by her sobs.

Maurice Clissold no longer doubted his visitant's humanity.

This was real grief, perchance real madness. For a little while he had fancied it a case of somnambulism. But the eyes which he had seen lifted despairingly to that moonlit sky had too much expression for the eyes of a somnambulist.

For a long time—or time that seemed long to Clissold's mind—the woman knelt by the window, now silent, motionless as an inanimate figure, now talking rapidly to herself, anon invoking that absent one whose broken promises were perhaps the cause of her wandering wits. Never had the young man beheld a more piteous spectacle. It was as if one of Wordsworth's most pathetic pastorals were here realized. His heart ached at the sound of those heart-broken sighs. This flesh and blood sorrow moved him more deeply than any spectral woe. This was no ghostly revisitant of earth, who acted over agonies dead and gone, but a living, loving woman, who mourned a lost or a faithless lover.



At last, with one farewell look seaward, as if it were along yon moonlit track across the waves she watched for the return of her lover, this new Hero turned from the casement, closed it carefully and quietly, and then slowly left the room. Maurice heard that slipshod foot going slowly along the passage, until the sound dwindled and died in the distance.

He fancied sleep would have been impossible after such a scene as this, but perhaps that overstrained attention of the last hour had exhausted his wakefulness, for he fell off presently into a sound slumber, from which he was only awakened by a friendly voice outside his door saying, ‘Six o’clock, Mr. Clissold. If you want the long round I promised you last night we ought to start at seven.’

‘All right,’ answered Maurice, as gaily as if no uncanny visitor had shortened his slumbers. ‘I’ll be with you in half an hour.’

He kept his word, and was down in the hall, or family sitting-room, just in time to hear the noisy old eight-day clock strike the half-hour,



with a slow and laborious movement of its inward anatomy, as if fast subsiding into dumbness and decrepitude. Mr. Trevanard had breakfasted an hour ago, and gone forth to his haymakers. Mrs. Trevanard was busy about the house, but the old blind grandmother sat in her corner, plying those never-resting needles, just as she had sat, just as she had knitted last night; with no more apparent share or interest in the active life around her than the old clock had.

There was a liberal meal ready for the stranger. Last night's round of beef, and a Cornish ham, archetype of hams, adorned the board, but were only intended as a reserve force in case of need, while the breakfast proper consisted of a dish of broiled ham and eggs, and another of trout, caught a hundred yards or so from the house that morning. Home-baked bread, white and brown, a wedge of golden honeycomb, and a plate of strawberries counted for nothing.

Both young men did justice to the breakfast, which they eat together, making the best use of the half-hour allotted for the meal, and not

talking so much as they had done last night at the more leisurely evening repast.

‘I hope you slept pretty well,’ said Martin, when he had taken the edge off a healthy appetite, and was trifling with a slice of beef.

‘Not quite so well as I ought to have done in so comfortable a bed. My brain was a little over-active, I believe.’

‘Ah, that’s a complaint I don’t suffer from. Father says I haven’t any brains. I tell him brains don’t grow at Borcel End. One year is so like another that we get to be a kind of clockwork, like poor old granny yonder. We get up every morning at the same hour, look out of our windows to see what sort of weather it is, eat and drink, and walk about the farm, and go to bed again, without using our minds at all from the beginning to the end of the business. Father and I brighten up a little on market days, but for the rest of our lives we might just as well be a couple of slow-going machines.’

‘There is nothing drowsy or mechanical about your mother’s nature, I should think, in spite of the quiet life you all lead here.’

‘No, mother’s mind is a candle that would burn to waste in a dark cellar. Her blood isn’t poppy-juice, like the Trevanards’. Do you know that my father has never been as far as Plymouth one way, or as far as Penzance the other way, in his life? He has no call to go, he says, so he doesn’t go. He squats here upon his land like a toad, and would if his life was to be threescore and ten centuries instead of as many years.’

‘You would like a different kind of life, I dare say,’ suggested Maurice.

The young man’s bright eye reminded him of a caged squirrel’s—a wild, freeborn creature, longing for the liberty of forests and untrodden groves.

‘Yes, if I could have chosen my own life, I would have been a soldier, like George Penwyn.’

‘To die by the hands of savages.’

‘Yes, they say he had a hard death, that those copper-coloured devils scalped him—tied him to a tree—tortured him. His soldiers went mad with revenge, and roasted some of the miscreants alive afterwards, I believe; but that wouldn’t bring the captain to life again.’

‘Do you remember him?’

‘Well. He used to come fishing in our water; the very stream that trout came out of this morning. I was a little chap of eight or nine years old when the Captain was last home, and used to catch flies for him, and carry his basket and loaf about with him half the day through; and many a half-crown has he given me, for he was an open-handed fellow always, and one of the handsomest, pleasantest young men I ever remember seeing—when I say young, I suppose he must have been past thirty at this time, for he was the oldest of the three brothers, and Balfour, the youngest, had been married ever so many years. But here’s the trap, and we’d better be off; good-bye, granny.’

The old woman gave a hoarse chuckle of response, marvellously like the internal rumbling of the ancient clock.

‘Good morning, ma’am,’ said Maurice, anxious to be civil; but of his salutation the dame took no notice.

The horse, though clumsily built, and not unacquainted with the plough, was a good goer. The



two young men had soon left Borcel End behind them, down in its sleepy hollow, and were driving over the fair green hills.

‘Now to fathom the mystery of last night’s adventure,’ thought Maurice, when they were out of sight of Borcel. ‘I think I can venture to speak pretty freely to this good-natured young man.’

He meditated a few minutes, and then began the attack.

‘When you asked me at breakfast how I rested last night, I didn’t give you quite a straightforward answer,’ he said. ‘There was a reason for my not getting a full allowance of sleep, which I didn’t care to speak of till you and I were alone.’

‘Indeed,’ said Martin Trevanard, looking round at him sharply. ‘What was that?’

There was a lurking anxiety in that keen glance of scrutiny, Maurice Clissold thought.

‘Some one came into my room in the dead of the night—a woman,’ he said. ‘At first I almost thought she was a ghost. I was never so near yielding to superstitious terror in my life. But I



soon discovered my mistake, and that she was only a living, suffering fellow-creature.’

‘I am very sorry such a thing should have happened,’ said Martin, gravely. ‘She ought to be better taken care of. The person you saw must have been my unfortunate sister.’

‘Your sister?’

‘Yes. She is ten years older than I, and not quite right in her mind. But she is perfectly harmless—has never in her life attempted to injure any one—not even herself, poor soul, though her own existence is dreary enough; and neither my father nor my mother will consent to send her away to be taken care of. Our old doctor sees her now and then, and doesn’t call her mad. She is only considered a little weak in her intellect.’

‘Has she been so from childhood?’ asked Maurice.

‘Oh dear no. She went to school at Helstone, and was quite an accomplished young woman, I believe—played the piano, and painted flowers, and was brought up quite like a young lady; never put her hand to dairy work, or anything of the kind. She

was a very handsome girl in those days, and father and mother were uncommonly proud of her. I can just remember her when she left school for good. I was always hanging about her, and I used to think she was like a beautiful princess in a fairy tale. She was very good to me, told me fairy stories, and sung to me in the twilight. Many a time I've fallen asleep in her lap, lulled by her sweet voice, when I was a little chap of eight or nine. There were only us two, and she was very fond of me. Poor Muriel !'

'What was it brought about such a change in her ?'

'Well, that's a story I've never quite got to the bottom of. It's a sore subject even with father, who's easy enough to deal with about most things. And as to mother, you have but to mention Muriel's name to make her look like thunder. Yet she's never unkind to the poor soul. I know that.'

'Does your sister live among you when you are alone ?'

'No, she has a little room over granny's, with a little old-fashioned staircase leading up to it. A room quite cut off from the rest of the house. You

can’t reach it except by going through granny’s bedroom, which is on the ground-floor, you must understand, on account of the old lady’s weak legs. Now one of poor Muriel’s fancies is to roam about the house in the middle of the night, especially moonlight nights, for the moonlight makes her wakeful. So, as a rule, granny locks her door of a night. However, I suppose last night the old lady forgot, in consequence of the excitement caused by your arrival, and that’s how you happened to have such an uncomfortable time.’

‘You haven’t told me even the little you do know as to the cause of your sister’s state.’

‘Haven’t I? All I know is what my father told me once. She was crossed in love, it seems—loved some one rather above her in station—and never got over it. That comes of being constant to one’s first fancy.’

‘You say she lives in a room by herself. Does she never have air or exercise?’

‘Do you imagine us barbarians? Yes, she roams about the old neglected garden at the back of the house, just as she pleases, but never goes beyond.

She has a pretty clear notion that that is her beat, poor girl, and I've never known her break bounds. Mother fetches her indoors at sunset, and gives her her supper, and sees that she's comfortable for the night, and tries to keep her clothes decent and tidy, but the poor soul tears them sometimes when her melancholy fit is upon her.

## CHAPTER IV.

‘AND I SHALL BE ALONE UNTIL I DIE.’

THE image of that white-robed figure, pallid face, and ebon hair haunted Maurice Clissold throughout the day, though his day was very pleasant, and Martin Trevanard the most cheerful of companions. They halted at various villages, explored old parish churches, where tarnished and blackened brasses told of mitred abbots, and lords of the soil, otherwise unrecorded and forgotten. Clissold was learned in church architecture, and not a gargoyle escaped his keen eye. Martin was pleased to exhibit the interesting features of his native land, and listened deferentially to Maurice's disquisitions on brasses, fonts, and piscinæ.

They stopped at a wayside inn, lunched heartily on bread and cheese and cider, and were altogether as companionable as young men can well be.



Martin had read about half a dozen books since he left Helstone grammar school, but those were of the highest character, and he had them in his heart of hearts. Shakespeare, Pope, and Byron were his poets ; Fielding, Goldsmith, and Scott his only romances.

From Shakespeare and Scott he had learned history, from Fielding and Goldsmith he had caught the flavour of wit and humour that are dead as the Latin classics. Thus Clissold found, not without a touch of surprise, that the farmer's son was no unworthy companion for a man who had made literature his profession.

On their homeward round they pulled up at Penwyn Church, which stood high and dry on the green hill-side, midway between the village and the manor, and looked like a church that had fallen from the sky, so completely was it out of everybody's way. Tradition insisted that in the Middle Ages there had been a village close to the church, but no trace of that vanished settlement remained. There stood the temple, square-towered, with crocketed finials at the four angles of the tower.

There lay its ancient slumberous graveyard on the slope of the hill, the dead for ever basking in the southern sun, which, in this midsummer weather, seemed to have power enough to warm them back to life again.

Here Maurice saw the resting-place of the Penwyns, almost as old as the church itself, a vault so large that these lords of the soil seemed to have a whole crypt to themselves. Very mouldy, and cold and dark, was this last abode of the squires and their race. Here he saw also the parish registers, which contained a concise synopsis of the history of the Penwyns since the Middle Ages, how they had been christened, married, and buried.

‘James ought to have been brought down here,’ said Maurice, when they were in the churchyard, where the deep soft grass was full of field flowers, and the air of sweet homely odours; not in that mouldy old crypt with his ancestral dust, but here amongst this thymy grass, face to face with the sun and the sea, and with the skylark singing above his grave. It would have been ever so much better than Kensal Green.’

It was eight o'clock when they drove down into the valley, where the old white house and its numerous barns and outbuildings looked like a village nestling in that grassy hollow. The scene looked just the same as last night, when Maurice Clissold approached it for the first time—the same stillness upon all things, the same low yellow light in the western sky, the same red glow from the hall fire, the same changeless figure of the old grandmother in her high-backed leather-covered arm-chair, half hidden in the shadow of the corner where she sat.

It wanted an hour to supper, and Mr. Trevanard was struggling with some accounts at a table by one of the windows, where he had the last of the dying daylight.

‘Hope you’ve had a pleasant day, sir,’ he said, without looking up from his papers, or relaxing the frown with which he contemplated a long column of figures. ‘Take a pull of that cider after your drive; it’s only just drawn.—You might give me a hand with these accounts, Martin. I never was a dab at figures.’

‘All right, father, we’ll soon tot ’em up.’

Martin sat down by his father, and took the pen out of his hand. Maurice refreshed himself with a draught of cider, and then went to the porch.

‘I should like to take a look round the place between this and supper-time, if you don’t mind, Mr. Trevanard,’ he said.

‘Look where you please, sir, you’re free and welcome. You’ll hear the supper-bell at nine o’clock.’

Maurice lighted a cigar as he left the porch, and prepared for a contemplative, dreamy stroll, one calm hour of solitude before the day was done.

He avoided the stackyard, and did not honour the various families of black and white piglings, in divers stages of infancy and adolescence, with his attention. He made a circuit of the pond, and went round to the back of the homestead, where lay that neglected garden which he had seen from the distance. At this midsummer-time it was a wilderness of verdure, and flowers ran wild. Great lavender bushes, forests of unpruned roses, tall white lilies, syringa, carnations, weeds, and blossoms, growing as



they would. Moss-grown paths, a broken sundial fallen across a bed of heart's-ease and mignonnette. Beyond the flower-garden there was a still deeper wilderness of hazel, quinces, and alders, which drew their chief sustenance from a shallow pool, whose dark shining surface was almost hidden by the spreading branches, the grey old trunks, the thick screen of leaves, through which the light came dimly even at noon.

A delightful spot for a meditative poet. Maurice was charmed with garden and wilderness, and lighted a second cigar on the strength of his discovery of the alder and quince grove.

It was not easy walking here by reason of the undergrowth of St. John's-wort, fern, and briar, which made a dense jungle, but after a little exploration Mr. Clissold came upon a narrow footpath, evidently well trodden, which wound in and out among the old grey trunks, and under the hazel boughs, till it brought him to the brink of the water.

The pool was wider than he had thought, but so covered with water-lilies that the dark water only

showed in patches through that thick carpet of shining leaves. Just such a pool as a stranger might easily walk into unawares. Maurice pulled up in time, and seated himself on the gnarled trunk of an alder, whose roots straggled deep down into the water, among sedges and innocent, harmless cresses. Here he slowly pulled at his cigar, abandoning himself to such thoughts as a poet has in such a scene and such an hour.

The last yellow gleam of the sun shone faintly behind the low thick trees, and through the one break in the wood the distant sea-line showed darkly grey, just where ocean merged into sky.

‘I should write better verses if I lived here for a year,’ thought Maurice, musing upon a certain volume which he meant to give the world by and bye. He hardly knew whether there would be much in it worthy the world’s acceptance. It was only the outpouring of a strong, fresh soul, a soul that had known its share of human sorrow, and done a brave man’s battle with care.

He was deep in a reverie that had led him very far away from Borcel End when he heard a rustling of

the branches near him, and turned quickly round, expecting to see Martin Trevanard.

The face that looked at him from between the parted hazel boughs startled him almost as much as that white-robed figure last night. It was the face he had seen in the moonlight, and which he saw now with peculiar distinctness in the clear grey light—a wan white face, with large dark eyes—a face which once must have been most beautiful. The dark eyes, the delicate features, were still beautiful, but the complexion was almost ghastly in its pallor, and the eyes were unnaturally bright. This was Muriel Trevanard.

Maurice thought she would have been frightened at sight of him, and would have hurried away. But, to his surprise, she came a little nearer him, cautiously, stealthily even, those restless eyes glancing right and left as she approached. There was a curious intensity in her gaze when her eyes fixed themselves at last upon his face, peering at him, scrutinizing him with something of her mother's keen look. One hand was lifted to her head to push back the wild mass of tangled hair, and the loose sleeve of her

gown fell back from the white wasted arm. Face and body seemed alike wasted by the mind’s consuming fire.

‘You can tell me, perhaps,’ she said, in a quick eager voice, ‘others won’t, they’re too unkind, for they must know. You can tell me, I’m sure. When will he come back?’

‘My poor soul, I would gladly tell you if I knew. But I don’t even know whom you are talking of.’

‘Oh yes, you do. Mother knows. She told you, I dare say. I’m not going to tell his name. I promised to keep that secret, whatever it cost me to be silent, and I’m not going to break my promise. When is he coming back?’

She paused, looking at him with beseeching expectant eyes, as if she waited breathless for his answer.

‘Is he ever coming back?’

She waited again.

‘Indeed, Miss Trevanard, I know nothing about it.’

‘How dare you call me Miss Trevanard? That’s not my name.’

‘Muriel, then.’



‘That’s better. He called me Muriel.’

Her chin dropped on her breast, and she stood for a few moments looking down at the water, all her face softened by some sweet sad thought.

‘He called me Muriel,’ she repeated. ‘Muriel, Muriel. I can hear his voice now. Hear it—yes, as plainly as I can see him when I close my eyes.’

Again a pause, and then an eager question.

‘How can he be dead when he is so near me? How can he be dead when I hear him and see him, and can even feel the touch of his hand upon my head, his lips upon my lips. He awakes me from my sleep sometimes with a kiss, but when I open my eyes he is gone. Was he always a spirit?’

She seemed unconscious of Maurice’s presence as she moved a few paces further along the water’s edge, always looking downward, in self-communion.

‘My love, how can they say that you are dead, when I am waiting for you so patiently, and will wait for you to the end—wait till you come to take me away with you? It was to be little more than a year, you told me. Oh, God, what a long year!’

The anguish in that last ejaculation pierced the

listener's heart as it had been pierced by her wild cry of sorrow last night. He followed her along the brink of the pool, put his arm round her shrunken form protectingly, and tried to comfort her as best he might, knowing so little of her grief.

‘Muriel,’ he said gently, and her name so spoken seemed to have a softening influence upon her, ‘I am almost a stranger to this place and to you, but I would gladly be your friend if I could. Tell me if there is anything I can do to comfort you. Are you happy in your home, with your poor old grandmother? or would you rather be somewhere else?’

He wanted to find out if she was suffering from any sense of ill-usage, if she felt herself a prisoner and an alien in her father's house.

‘No,’ she said, resolutely, ‘I must stay here. He will come and fetch me.’

‘But you speak sometimes as if you knew him to be dead. Is it not foolish, vain, to hope for that which cannot happen?’

‘He is not dead. People have told me so on purpose to break my heart, I think. Haven't I told you that I see him very often?’

‘ Then why are you so unhappy ? ’

‘ Because he will not stay with me—because he does not come to fetch me away, as he promised, in a little more than a year—because he comes and goes like a spirit. Perhaps they are right, and he is really dead.’

‘ Would it not be better to make up your mind to that, and to leave off watching for him, and roaming about the house at night ? ’

‘ Who told you that ? ’ she asked, quickly.

‘ Never mind who told me. You see I know how foolish you are. Wouldn’t it be wiser to try and go back to the common business of life, to bind up all that loose hair neatly, like a lady, and to try to be a comfort to your father and mother.’

At that last word an angry cry broke from the pale lips.

‘ Mother ! ’ echoed Muriel, ‘ I have no mother. That woman yonder,’ pointing towards the house, ‘ is my worst enemy. Mother ! My mother ! ’ with a bitter laugh. ‘ Ask her what she has done with my child ? ’

That question came upon Maurice Clissold like a

revelation. Here was a sadder story than he had dreamt of, a story which no word of Martin’s had hinted at, a story of shame as well as of sorrow, perchance. He remained silent, troubled and perplexed by this new turn of affairs. His office of consoler, his attempt to smooth the tangled threads of a disordered brain, came to an end all at once.

The woman turned from him impatiently, muttering to herself as she went away. He followed her along the sinuous footpath, and across the garden, and watched her as she entered by a low half-glass door at the back of the house. He passed this door afterwards, and stole a glance through the glass into a large low room, where there was a fire burning—a room which he divined to be the grandmother’s chamber.

An old-fashioned tent bedstead, with red and white chintz curtains, occupied one side of the room ; a ponderous old arm-chair stood near the fireplace ; a huge wooden chest made at once a seat and a receptacle for all kinds of household stores ; a corner cupboard filled with crockery ware, and a small round



table near the hearth, completed the catalogue of furniture.

Here, on the hearth-rug, sat Muriel, her wild hair falling about her face, her hands clasped upon her knees, her eyes bent gloomily upon the burning log.

The supper-bell rang from the porch on the other side of the homestead while Maurice was watching that melancholy figure by the hearth.

‘She has taken away my appetite for supper,’ he said to himself, ‘and has almost set me against Borcel End.’

That last speech of Muriel Trevanard’s troubled him—‘Ask her what she has done with my child?’

It set him thinking of dark stories of family pride and hidden crime. It took the flavour of enjoyment out of this rustic home, and imparted a taint of mystery and suspicion which poisoned the atmosphere.

## CHAPTER V.

‘ SURELY, MOST BITTER OF ALL SWEET THINGS THOU  
ART.’

MAURICE CLISSOLD keenly scrutinized Bridget Trevanard's face as they sat at supper that evening. Muriel's look of horror at the mention of her mother's name had inspired unpleasant doubts upon the subject of his hostess's character. He remembered how Elspeth had told him that Mrs. Trevanard was known as a hard woman ; and he told himself that cruelty, or even crime, might be consistent with that hard nature which had won for the farmer's wife the reputation of a stern and exacting mistress. His closer examination of that face showed him no indication of lurking evil. That square, unwrinkled brow, those dark brown eyes, with their keen, straight outlook, denoted at least an honest nature. The firm lips, the square jaw, gave severity to the countenance—a resolute woman—a woman not to be turned from

her purpose, thought Maurice, but a woman whom he could hardly imagine capable of crime.

And then why give credence to the rambling assertions of lunacy ? It is the nature of madness to accuse the sane. Maurice tried to put the thought of Muriel's wild talk out of his mind ; yet that awful question, 'What has she done with my child ?' haunted him.

He felt less desire to prolong his stay at Borcel. The restful tranquillity of the place seemed to have departed. Muriel's fevered mind had its influence upon the atmosphere. He could not forget that she was near—wakeful, unhappy—waiting for the lover who was never to return to her.

He took good care to lock his door that night, and his slumbers were undisturbed. The next morning was devoted to a long ramble with Martin. They walked to a distant hill-side, where there were some Druidic remains well worth inspection ; came back to the farm in time for the substantial early dinner, had a look at the haymakers dining plenteously in a great stone kitchen, and then retired to a field where the hay was cocked, to lie

basking in the sun, with their faces seaward, dreaming away the summer afternoon.

Here Maurice told Martin the story of James Penwyn's death, and the brief love story which had come to so pitiful an ending.

‘Poor child,’ he said, musingly, recalling his last interview with Justina, ‘I verily believe she loved him truly and honestly, and would have made him a good wife. I never saw a nobler countenance than that player girl's. I'm sorry I thrust myself between them with so much as one hard word.’

‘Was no one ever suspected of the murder?’ asked Martin.

‘Yes,’ replied Maurice, without taking his cigar from his lips, ‘I was for a little while.’

This was rather startling. Martin Trevanard stared at his new acquaintance with a curious look for a moment or so, before he recovered himself.

‘You were?’

‘Yes. Didn't you know? My name was in the papers, but I believe they did me the favour to spell it wrong. Perhaps I ought to have mentioned the fact when I was asking Mrs. Trevanard to take me



in. Yes, I, his bosom friend, was the only person they could pitch upon when they wanted to find the assassin. Yes, I have been in Eborsham gaol under suspicion as a murderer. The charge broke down at the inquest, and I came off with flying colours, I believe. Still there the fact remains. The Spinnersbury detectives put the crime down to me.'

'It would need pretty strong proof to make *me* suspect you,' said Martin, heartily.

'I was a good many miles away from the spot when that cursed deed was done, but it did not suit me to advertise my exact whereabouts to the world.'

'Why not?'

'Because to have told the truth would have been to compromise a woman, the only one I ever loved, as a man loves one chosen woman out of all the world.'

'Martin threw away his unfinished cigar, turned himself about upon the haycock which he had chosen for his couch, and settled himself to hear something interesting, with a bright eager look in his dark eyes.

‘Tell me all about it,’ he said.

‘Bah! weak sentimentality,’ muttered Maurice,  
‘I should only bore you.’

‘No, you wouldn’t. I should like to hear it.’

‘Well, naming no names, and summing up the matter briefly, there will be no harm done. It is the story of a dead and buried folly, that’s all; a hackneyed commonplace story enough.’

He sighed, as if the recollection hurt him a little, dead as this old foolishness might be—sighed and looked seaward dreamily, as if he were looking back into the past.

‘You must know that when I was a year or two younger, and life was fresher to me, I went a good deal into what people call society—didn’t set my face against new acquaintances, dinner parties, dances, and so forth, as I do now. I’ve a fair income for a bachelor, belong to a good family, and can hold my own position well in a crowd. Now amongst the houses I visited in those days there were only two or three where I went from sheer honest regard for the people I visited. Among these was the house of a certain fashionable physician, not

a hundred miles from Cavendish Square. He was a widower, with three daughters, the two elder thorough women of the world, and most delightful girls to know. We were chums from the outset. They drove me about in their barouche, made me useful as an escort at flower shows, a perambulatory catalogue at picture galleries, and we all three comprehended perfectly that I was not to dream of marrying either of them.'

'Dangerous, I should think,' suggested Martin.

'Safe as the Tarpeian rock. My feelings for the dear girls were of a purely fraternal character from the first. I would as soon have bought the winner of the last Derby for a Park hack as had one of these two for my wife. I went shopping with them occasionally, twiddled my thumbs at Peter Robinson's while they turned over silks, and I knew the amount of millinery required for their sustenance. No, Martin, there was no peril here. Unluckily, there was the third daughter—a tender slip of a girl, hardly out of the schoolroom—a child who had her gowns meted out to her by her sisters, and wore perpetual white muslin for evening dress, and

brown holland for morning. Good heavens! I can see her this moment, standing by the piano in her holland frock, with a blue ribbon twisted through her loose brown hair, and those divine hazel eyes looking at me pleadingly, as who should say, “Be gentle to me, you see what a child I am.” No worldliness here—no ambition here—no avid desire of millinery—no set purpose of making a great marriage, I said to myself. Only innocence, and trustfulness, and childlike meekness. So I fell over head and ears in love with my friend’s third daughter.

‘Very natural,’ said Martin. ‘I don’t see why it shouldn’t have ended pleasantly.’

‘I didn’t act like a sneak—make love to the girl behind her sisters’ backs, and bide my time for winning her. I went to the doctor at once, told him what had happened, ventured to add that I thought my darling liked me, and asked his permission to offer her my hand. He hummed and hawed, said there was no one he would like better for a son-in-law; but his youngest child was really not out of the nursery, any question of an engagement was



absurd. It seemed only yesterday that he had bought her a Shetland pony. However, he gave me to understand, in a general way, that I was free to come and go, so our intimacy knew no abatement. I still did the walking-stick business at flower shows, and the catalogue business at exhibitions, and made myself generally useful, seeing a good deal of my fair blossom-like maiden in the meanwhile. We met very often, sat together of an evening unnoticed when the room was full, and before long we knew that we loved each other, and we had sworn that for us two there should be no love but this. Papa might say what he liked about youth and foolishness and Shetland ponies. We were not impatient, we would wait for ever so many years, if necessary, but in good time we two should be one. Sweet and tender promises breathed in the twilight from lips too lovely to betray, dove-like eyes lifted shyly to mine, soft little hand resting so fondly within my arm! I laugh when I think of you, and how it all ended.'

He did laugh bitterly, savagely almost, as he flung the stump of his cigar across the hay-cocks

towards the sea. Martin waited in respectful silence, awed by this little gust of passion.

‘Well, we were pledged to each other and happy. This went on for a year. Nobody took any notice of us, any more than if we had been children playing at lovers. We lived in a foolish Paradise of our own, at least I did. Heaven only knows what her thoughts may have been. One day, when I had been away from town for a week or so, I called in Cavendish Square, saw the two elder girls, and heard that my betrothed had gone for a long visit to some friends in Yorkshire, at a place called Tilney Longford, a fine old country seat. Papa had thought her looking pale and thin, and had sent her off at a day’s notice. She might be away two or three months. Lady Longford was the kindest of women, and was always asking them to stay at her place. “We can’t go, of course,” they said, “with our large circle; but that child has no ties, and can stay as long as they like to keep her.”

‘This was hard upon me. The privilege of correspondence was denied us, for I could not write my darling a clandestine letter. I went to the doctor a

second time, and told him that I had waited a year, that I was so much deeper in love by every day of that blessed year, and urged him to receive me as his daughter's suitor. He treated the question rather more seriously than before, repeated his assurance that I was the very man he would have liked for a son-in-law, but added that he did not consider my income sufficiently large, or my profession sufficiently lucrative to allow of his entrusting his daughter's happiness to my care. "My girls have been expensively brought up," he said. "You have no notion what they cost me. I have been too busy to teach them prudence. It has been easier for me to earn money for them to waste than to find leisure to check their extravagance. We live in too fast an age for the vulgar virtues." I argued the point, but vainly, and told him that whatever decision he might arrive at, his youngest daughter and I had made up our minds to be true to each other against all opposition. "I am sorry to hear that," he replied, "for it will oblige me to ask you to discontinue your visits here when my little girl comes back, a discourtesy which goes very much against the grain."

I left him in a white heat, went straight off to James Penwyn, and arranged a tour which we had been talking about ever so long. We were to walk through the north of England, and I was to coach poor Jim for his last struggle at Oxford. London was hateful to me now that my darling had left it, and James Penwyn’s company the only society I cared for.’

He paused, abandoned himself to the memory of that vanished past for a little, and then went on more hurriedly.

‘It was at Eborsham, the morning before James Penwyn’s murder, that I received the first and last letter I was ever to get from my love. She had addressed it to me at my London lodgings, and it had been travelling about after me for the last three weeks. Her first letter! I opened it with such a thrill of joy, thinking how divine it was of her to be so daring as to write to me. Such a broken-hearted letter!—telling me how a certain rich landowner, near Lady Longford’s, had proposed to her—she broke into a parenthesis, a page long, to assure me she had never given him the faintest encourage-



ment—and how everybody persuaded her to accept him, and how her father himself had come down to Tilney to lecture her into subjection. “But it is all useless,” she said, “I will marry no one but my own dear love; and, oh, please, write and tell me what I am to do.” Think what I must have felt, Trevanard, when I considered that the letter was three weeks old, and what persecution the poor little soul might have had to suffer in the interval.’

‘What did you do?’

‘Can you ask me? I started off without a quarter of an hour’s delay, and got to Tilney as soon as the trains would carry me. It was an abominable cross-country journey, and there I was eating my heart out at dismal junctions for half the day. It was past three o’clock when I ended my journey of something less than a hundred miles, and found myself at a detestable little station called Tilney Road, eight miles from Tilney Longford, and no conveyance of any kind to be had. I did the distance in something under two hours, and entered the park gates just as the church clock hard by was striking five.’

‘ You went straight to the house ? ’

‘ No, I didn’t want to bring trouble upon that poor child, so I prowled about the place like a poacher, skirting the carriage roads. Luckily for me, there was a right of way through the park, so I was able to get pretty close to the house without attracting any one’s particular attention. I reflected that, unless the doctor was still there—not a likely thing for a man whose moments were gold—there was no one to recognise me except my poor pet. As I approached the gardens I heard laughter and fresh young voices, and a general hubbub, on the other side of the haw-haw which divided the park from a croquet lawn. There was a gaily striped marquee on one side of the lawn, a group of people taking tea under a gigantic cedar, and a double set of croquet players disporting on the level sward. My eyes were keen as a hawk’s to distinguish my dearest in mauve muslin and an innocent little chip hat trimmed with daisies—I observed even details, you see—busily engaged with her attendant cavalier, and with no appearance of being bored by his society. Her fresh young laugh

rang out silver-clear—that girlish laugh which had been one of her many charms, to my mind. “That hardly sounds like a broken heart,” I said to myself.’

He sighed, and waited for a minute or so, and then resumed in a harder voice,—

‘ Well, I was determined to form no judgment from appearances ; and I could not stand on the other side of the haw-haw taking observations from the covert of an old hawthorn for ever, so I went round to the back of the house, waylaid a neat little Abigail, and asked her if she could find Miss Blank’s maid for me. I accompanied my question with a fee which insured compliance, and my pretty one’s handmaiden appeared presently at the gate where I was waiting. She remembered me among the intimates in Cavendish Square, and consented to give her mistress the note I scribbled on a leaf of my pocket-book : “ I hope I am not doing wrong, sir,” she said, “ but a young lady in my mistress’s position cannot be too careful how she acts——” “ In what position ? ” I asked. “ Didn’t you know, sir, my young lady is to be married the day after to-morrow ? ” ’

‘That was a facer!’ exclaimed Martin.

‘It wasn’t a pleasant thing to hear, was it—with that letter in my pocket vowing eternal fidelity? The remembrance of that gay young laughter was hardly pleasant either. The man I had seen on the croquet lawn was a good-looking fellow enough; and then one man is so like another now-a-days. A woman may be constant to the type whilst she jilts the individual. I had written to my betrothed, asking her to meet me in the park at nine o’clock, by a certain obelisk which I had observed on my way. By nine she would be free, I fancied, in that half hour of liberty which the women get after dinner, while the men are talking politics and pretending to be very wise about claret.’

‘Did she come?’

‘Yes, poor, pretty, shallow-hearted thing, looking very sweet in the moonlight, but tearful and trembling, as if she thought I should beat her. She sobbed out her wretched little story. Papa had been so kind, her elder sisters had badgered her. Poor Reginald, the lover, had been so good, so generous, so self-sacrificing, and it had ended as such things gene-



rally do end, I dare say. She was to be married to him the day after to-morrow. "And oh, Maurice, pray give me back my letter," she said, "for I don't know what would become of me if it ever fell into Reginald's hands."'

'How did you answer her?'

'With never a word. I tore the lying letter into atoms, and threw them away on the summer wind. I made my love a respectful bow and left her, never, I trust in God, to see her fair, false face again.'

## CHAPTER VI.

‘WE ARE PAST THE SEASON OF DIVIDED ILLS.’

IF any one had asked Maurice Clissold why he had bared old wounds in the dreamy restfulness of that June afternoon in the hayfield, and why he had chosen Martin Trevanard for his father-confessor, he would have been sorely puzzled to answer so natural a question. That inexpressible longing to talk of himself and his own sorrows which seizes upon men now and then had laid hold of him, and there had been a kind of bitter pleasure, a half-cynical enjoyment in going over that story of the dead past. There was something sympathetic about Martin, too, a man who might have been crossed in love himself, Maurice thought, or who at least had a latent capacity for sincerest passion. Friendship had proved a plant of rapid growth in the utter solitude of Borcel End. Maurice felt that he could talk to

this young Trevanard very much as he had talked to James Penwyn, knowing very well that he might not be always understood when his flights of fancy went widest, but very sure of sympathy at all times.

That afternoon was Saturday, and on the following morning perfect rest reigned at Borcel End. Even the ducks seemed less noisy than usual, as if their own voices startled them unpleasantly in the universal silence. Mr. and Mrs. Trevanard came down to the eight o'clock breakfast, luxurious Sabbath hour, in their best clothes, the farmer seeming somewhat embarrassed by the burden of respectability involved in sleek new broad cloth and a buff waistcoat starched to desperation, Mrs. Trevanard stern and even dignified of aspect in her dark grey silk gown and smart Sunday cap.

‘Would you like to go to church?’ Martin asked, with some faint hesitation, lest his new friend, being something of a poet, should also be something of an infidel.

‘By all means. You drive, I suppose, as it’s so far?’

Penwyn church, that lonely church among the

hills, was the nearest to Borcel, a good four miles off at least.

‘Yes, we drive to church and back. Mother says it goes against her to have the horse out on the Sabbath, but the distance is more than she could manage.’

The morning service began at half-past ten, so at half-past nine the dog-cart was at the door, for there was a good deal of walking up and down hill to be allowed for, driving in this part of the country being not altogether a lazy business. The two young men, who occupied the back seat, were continually getting up and down, and had walked about half the distance by the time they came to the quiet old church whose single bell clanged over the green hill-side.

‘I’m blest if the Squire and Mrs. Penwyn haven’t come back!’ cried Martin, descrying a handsome landau and pair in front of them as they drew near the church.

‘Are you sure that’s the Penwyn carriage? They were not expected three days ago,’ said Maurice.

‘Quite sure. We’ve no other gentry hereabouts, except the Morgrave Park people, and they hardly



ever are at home. There is no doubt about it. That is Mr. Penwyn's carriage.'

'Then I'll renew my acquaintance with him after church,' said Maurice.

The old grey church, which he had explored two days ago, had quite a gay look in its Sunday guise. The farmers' wives and daughters in their fine bonnets—the villagers, with their sunburnt faces and Sabbath cleanliness—the servants from the Manor, occupying two pews under the low gallery, within which dusky recess the livery of Churchill Penwyn's serving-men gleamed gaily, while the bonnets of the maids, all more or less in the last Parisian fashion, made the shadowy corner a perfect flower-bed. And most important of all, in a large square pew in the chancel appeared the Manor House family—Churchill, gentlemanlike and inscrutable, with his pale, thoughtful face, and grave grey eyes—Madge, looking verily the young queen of that western land—and Viola, fair and flower-like, a beauty to be worshipped so much the more for that frail loveliness which had a fatal air of evanescence.

‘I’m afraid she won’t live long,’ whispered Martin to his companion, in one of the pauses of the service, while the purblind old clerk was hunting for the antiquated psalm, Tate and Brady, which it was his duty to give out.

‘Not Mrs. Penwyn? Why, she looks the picture of health,’ replied Maurice, in a similar undertone.

Martin coloured like a schoolboy justly suspected of felonious views in relation to apples.

‘I meant the fair one,’ he gasped, ‘her sister.’

‘She! Ah! looks rather consumptive,’ replied Maurice, heartlessly.

The Borcel End and Manor House families met in the churchyard after the service—Borcel End respectful, and not intrusive—the Manor House kindly, cordial even, with no taint of patronage. In sooth, Michael Trevanard was the best tenant a landowner could have; a man who was always improving his holding, and paid his rent to the hour; a man to take the chair at audit dinners, and stumble through a proposal of his landlord’s health.

‘You didn’t expect to see us so soon, did you, Mrs. Trevanard?’ said Madge, with her bright

smile ; 'but we all grew tired of town in the middle of the season.'

'We're always glad to see you back,' said Michael, screwing up his courage, and jerking out the words as if they were likely to choke him. 'The place doesn't seem homelike when there's no family at the Manor House. You see we were accustomed to see the old Squire pottering about the place from year's end to year's end, and entering into every little bit of improvement we made ; and as familiar, you know, as if he was one of ourselves. That spoiled us a bit, I make no doubt.'

'It shall not be my fault if you do not come to consider me one of yourselves in good time, Mr. Trevanard,' said Churchill kindly—kindly, but without that real heartiness which makes a country gentleman popular among his vassals.

Maurice was standing in the background, and it was only at this moment that Mr. Penwyn recognised him. Something like a spasm of pain changed his face for a moment, as if some unwelcome memory were suddenly brought back to him.

‘Natural enough,’ thought Maurice. ‘The last time we met was at his cousin’s funeral, and it is hardly a pleasant idea for any man that he stands in the shoes of the untimely dead.’

That momentary flush of pain past, Mr. Penwyn welcomed the stranger in the land with exceeding cordiality.

‘How long have you been in Cornwall, Mr. Clissold?’ he asked. ‘You ought not to come to Penwyn without putting up at the Manor House.’

‘You are very good. I have been to the Manor House, and ventured to put forward my acquaintance with you as a reason why your faithful old house-keeper should let me see your house. I dare say she has forgotten to mention the fact.’

‘There has been scarcely time. We only arrived last night. Let me present you to my wife.—Madge, this is the Mr. Clissold of whom you have heard me speak; Mr. Clissold, Mrs. Penwyn, her sister Miss Bellingham.’

Madge acknowledged the introduction with something less than her accustomed sweetness. Although Churchill was so thoroughly convinced of the man’s



innocence, Madge had not quite made up her mind that he was guiltless of his friend's blood. He had been suspected, and the taint clung to him yet.

Still when she looked at the dark earnest eyes, the open brow, the firm mouth with its expression of subdued power, the countenance on which thought had exercised its refining influence, she began to think that Churchill must be right in this opinion as in all other things, and that this man was incapable of crime.

So when, after questioning Mr. Clissold as to his whereabouts, Churchill asked him to go back to the Manor House with them for luncheon, and to bring his friend Martin Trevanard, Madge seconded the invitation. 'If Mrs. Trevenard can spare her son for a few hours,' she added graciously.

Mrs. Trevanard curtseyed, and thanked Mrs. Penwyn for her condescension, but added that she did not hold with young people keeping company with their superiors, and thought that Martin would be better at home in his own sphere.

‘If I had ever seen good come of it I might think differently,’ said the farmer’s wife with a gloomy look, ‘but I never have.’

Martin looked angry, and his father embarrassed.

‘I hope you’ll excuse my wife for being so free-spoken,’ Mr. Trevanard said, in a rather clumsy apology. ‘She doesn’t mean to be uncivil, but there are points——’ here he came aground hopelessly, and could only repeat in a feeble tone—‘There are points.’

‘Thanks for your kind invitation, Mr. Penwyn,’ said Martin, still flushed with shame and anger, ‘but you see I’m not supposed to have a will of my own yet awhile, and must do as my mother tells me.’

‘Come along, old lady,’ said Michael, and after making their salaams to the quality, the Borcel End party retired to the dog-cart. The horse had been tethered on the sward near at hand, browsing calmly throughout the hour and a half service.

Maurice drove off with the Penwyns in the landau.

‘What a very disagreeable person that Mrs. Trevanard seems!’ said Madge. ‘I should think it could be hardly pleasant staying in her house, Mr. Clissold.’

‘She is eccentric rather than disagreeable, I think,’ replied Maurice, ‘a woman with a fixed idea which governs all her conduct. I had hard work to persuade her to let me stop at the farm, but she has been an excellent hostess. And her son Martin is a capital fellow—one of Nature’s gentlemen.’

‘Yes, I liked his manner, except when he got so angry with his mother. But she was really too provoking, with her preachment about equality, more especially as these Trevanards belong to a good old Cornish family. Do they not, Churchill?’

‘Yes, love. By Tre, Pol, and Pen, you may know the Cornish men. I believe these are some of the original Tres. Admirable tenants too. One can hardly make too much of them.’

‘Do you know anything about their daughter?’ asked Maurice of Mr. Penwyn.

‘Yes, I have heard of her, but never seen her. A poor half-witted creature, I believe.’

'Not half-witted, but deranged. Her brain has evidently been turned by some great sorrow. From what I can gather she must have loved some one superior to her in rank, and been ill-treated by him. I fancy this is why Mrs. Trevanard says bitter things about inequality of station.'

'An all-sufficient reason. I shall never feel angry with Mrs. Trevanard again,' said Madge.

The Manor House looked much gayer and brighter to-day, with servants passing to and fro, great bowls of roses on all the tables, banks of flowers in the windows, new books scattered on the tables, holland covers banished to the limbo of household stores, and two pretty women lending the charm of their presence to the scene.

Never had Maurice Clissold seen husband and wife so completely happy, or more entirely suited to each other than these two seemed. Domestic life at Penwyn Manor House was like an idyl. Simple, unaffected happiness showed itself in every look, in every word and tone. There was just that amount of plenteousness and luxury in all things which makes life smooth and pleasant, without the faintest



ostentation. A certain subdued comfort reigned everywhere, and Churchill in no wise fell into the common errors of men who have suffered a sudden elevation to wealth. He neither 'talked rich,' nor told his friends with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders that he had just enough for bread and cheese. In a word, he took things easily.

As a husband he was, in Viola's words, 'simply perfect.' It was impossible to imagine devotedness more thorough yet less obtrusive. His face never turned towards his wife without brightening like a landscape in a sudden gleam of sunlight. There was nothing that could be condemned as 'spooning' between these married lovers, yet no one would fail to understand that they were all the world to each other.

Viola had long since altered her mind about Mr. Penwyn. From thinking him 'not quite nice,' she had grown to consider him adorable. To her he had been all generosity and kindness, treating her in every way as if she had been his own sister, and a sister well beloved. She had the prettiest possible suite of rooms at Penwyn, a horse of Churchill's

own choosing, her own piano, her own maid, and more pocket-money than she had ever had in her life before.

‘It comes rather hard upon Churchill to have two young women to provide for instead of one. Viola remarked to her sister; ‘but he is so divinely good about it—she was a young lady who delighted in strong adverbs — ‘that I hardly realize what a sponge I am.’

And then came sisterly embracings and protestations. Thus the Penwyn Manor people were altogether the happiest of families.

Maurice thoroughly enjoyed his day at Penwyn. After luncheon they all rambled about the grounds, Churchill and his wife always side by side, so that the guest had the pretty Miss Bellingham for his companion.

‘It might be dangerous for another man,’ he said to himself, ‘but I’ve had my lesson. No more fair soft beauties for me. If ever I suffer myself to fall in love again it shall be with a girl who looks as if she could knock me down if I offended her. A girl with as much character in her face as

that actress poor James was so fond of. Of the two I think I would rather have Clytemnestra than Helen. I dare say Menelaus believed his wife a pattern of innocence and purity till he woke one morning and found she had levanted with Paris.'

Thus secure from the influence of her attractions Mr. Clissold made himself very much at home with Miss Bellingham. She showed him all the beauties of Penwyn, spots where a glimpse of the sea looked brightest through a break in the pine grove, hollows where the ferns grew deepest and greenest, and proved a very different guide from Elspeth.

'I have been through the grounds before,' said Maurice, 'but on that occasion my companion did not enhance the beauties of nature by the charm of her society.'

'Who was your companion?'

'The granddaughter of the woman at the Lodge. Rather curious people, are they not?'

'Yes, I have often wondered how my brother came to pick them up, for they are not natives of the soil, as almost every one else is at Penwyn. But Churchill says the old woman is a very estimable

person, well worthy of her post, so one can say no more about it.’

When Maurice wanted to take leave, his new friends insisted that he should stay to dinner, Mr. Penwyn offering to send him home in a dog-cart. This favour, however, the sturdy pedestrian steadfastly declined.

‘I am not afraid of a night walk across the hills,’ he said, ‘and am getting as familiar with the country about here as if I were to the manner born.’

So he stayed, and assisted at Mrs. Penwyn’s kettledrum, which was held in the old Squire’s yew-tree bower on the bowling-green, an arbour made of dense walls of evergreen, cool in summer, and comfortably sheltered in winter.

Here they drank tea, lazily enjoying the freshening breeze from the great wide sea, the sea which counts so many argosies for her spoil, the mighty Atlantic! Here they talked of literature and the world, and rapidly progressed in friendliness. But not one word was said of James Penwyn, who, save for that shot fired from behind a hedge, would have been master of grounds and bower, manor



and all thereto belonging. That was a thought which flashed more than once across Maurice's mind,

‘How happy these people seem in the possession of a dead man's goods!’ he thought, ‘how placidly they enjoy his belongings, how coolly they accept fate's awful decree! Only human nature I suppose.

“Les morts durent bien peu, laissons les sous la pierre.”’

He stayed till ten o'clock, and left charmed with host and hostess.

Churchill Penwyn had been at his best all day, a man whose talk was worth hearing, and whose opinions were not feeble echoes of Saturday's literary journals. After dinner they had music, as well as conversation, and Madge played some of Mozart's finest church music—choice bits culled from the Masses.

‘How long do you stay in Cornwall?’ was the question at parting.

‘About a week longer at Borcel End, I suppose. But I am my own master as to time. I have no legitimate profession—for I believe literature hardly comes under that head,—and am therefore something of a Bohemian: not in a bad sense, Miss Bellingham, so please don't look alarmed.

‘Why not come to us instead of staying at Borcel End?’ asked Churchill.

‘You are too good. But I could hardly do that. When I offered myself to Mrs. Trevanard as a lodger, I said I should stay for a week or two, and she is just the kind of woman to feel wounded if I left her abruptly. And then, Martin and I are great friends. He is really one of the best fellows I ever met, except—except the friend I lost,’ he added, quickly and huskily, feeling that any allusion of that kind was ill-judged here.

‘Well, you must do just as you please about it, but give us as much of your company as you can. We shall have a dinner next week, I believe.’

‘Saturday,’ said Madge.

‘You will come to us then, of course. And as often in the meanwhile as you can.’

‘Thanks. The dinner-party is out of the question. I travel with a knapsack, and am three hundred miles from my dress suit. But if you will allow me to drop in now and then between this and Saturday I shall be delighted.’

## CHAPTER VII.

‘THE DROWSY NIGHT GROWS ON THE WORLD.’

THE advent of the Manor House family made life all the more pleasant to Mr. Clissold at Borcel End. It imparted variety to his existence, and the homely comfort of the farmhouse was agreeably contrasted by the refinement of Mr. Penwyn's surroundings. He dined at Penwyn twice during the week, and as he became more familiar with the interior of Churchill's home, only saw fresh proofs of its perfect happiness. Here were a man and a woman who made the most and the best of wealth and position, and shed an atmosphere of contentment around them.

With Martin for his companion, Maurice saw all that was worth seeing within the reach of Borcel End. They drove to Seacomb, the nearest market town, and explored the church there, which was old and full of interest. Here, in looking over the

register for some name of world-wide renown, Maurice stumbled upon an entry that aroused his curiosity.

It was in the register of baptisms,—

‘Emily Jane, daughter of Matthew Elgood, comedian, and Jane Elgood his wife.’ The date was just eighteen years ago.

‘Matthew Elgood. That girl’s father was Matthew,’ thought Maurice, ‘can it be the same man, I wonder? Yes, Matthew Elgood, comedian. There would hardly be two men of the same name and calling. His daughter must be the age of the child baptized here, for I remember James telling me that she was just seventeen.’

The infant was certainly recorded in the register as Emily Jane, and the young actress’s name was Justina. But Mr. Clissold concluded that this was merely a fictitious appellation, chosen for euphony. He made up his mind that the child entered in these old yellow pages, and the girl he had seen weeping for his friend’s untimely death, were one and the same. Strange that the sweetheart of James Penwyn’s choice had been born so near the cradle of



his own race. It was as if there had been some subtle sympathy between these children of the same soil, and their hearts had gone forth to each other spontaneously.

‘Is there a theatre at Seacomb?’ asked Maurice, wondering how that quiet old town could have afforded a field for Mr. Elgood’s talents.

‘Not now,’ replied Martin. ‘There used to be, some years ago. The building exists still, but it has been converted into a chapel. It answers better than the theatre did, I believe.’

The week came to an end. Maurice attended a second service at Penwyn Church, and paid a farewell visit to the Manor House on Sunday afternoon. This time he refused Mr. Penwyn’s hearty invitation to dinner, and wished his new friends good-bye shortly after luncheon, with cordial expressions of friendship on both sides.

He walked across the hills, ruminating upon all that had happened since he first followed that track, with Elspeth for his guide. He had made acquaintance with the interior of two families since then, in both of which he felt considerable interest.

‘Churchill Penwyn must be a thoroughly good fellow,’ he said to himself, ‘or he would never have behaved so well as he has to me. It would have been so natural for him to be prejudiced against me by that business at Eborsham. But he has not only done me the justice to disbelieve the accusation from the very first; he has taken pains to let me see I am in no way damaged in his opinion by the suspicion that has attached to me.’

Maurice had made up his mind to leave Borcel End next day. He had thoroughly explored the neighbourhood, and thoroughly enjoyed the tranquil pastoral life at the farmhouse, and he saw no reason for delaying his departure to fresher scenes. Mrs. Trevanard had heard of his resolution with indifference, her husband with civil regret, Martin with actual sorrow.

‘I don’t know how I shall get on when you are gone,’ he said. ‘It has been so nice to have some one to talk to, whose ideas rise above threshing-machines and surface drainage. Father’s a good old soul, but he and I have precious little to say to each other. Now, with you, the longest day seems short.’

I think you've taught me more since we've been together than all I learnt at Helstone.'

'No, Martin, I haven't taught you anything. I've only stirred up the old knowledge that was in you, hidden like stagnant water under duckweed,' answered Maurice. 'But we are not going to bid each other good-bye for ever. I shall come down to Borcel End again, you may be very sure, if your people will let me; and whenever you come to London you must take up your quarters with me, and I'll show you some of the pleasantest part of London life.'

Maurice really regretted parting from the young man who had been the brightest and most light-hearted of companions, and he regretted leaving Borcel End without knowing a little more of Muriel Trevanard's history.

He had thought a good deal upon this family secret during the past week, though in all his wanderings about the old neglected garden, or down in the wilderness of hazel by the pond—and he had smoked many a cigar there in the interval—he had never again encountered Muriel. He had no reason

to suppose there was any undue restraint placed upon her movements, or that she was unkindly treated by any one. Yet the thought that she was there, a part of the family, yet divided from it, banished from the home circle, yet so near, cut off from all the simple pleasures of her father's hearth, haunted him at all times. He was thinking of her this afternoon during his lonely walk across the hills. She was more in his thoughts than the people he had left.

It was past six o'clock when he entered the old hall at Borcel End, and he was struck at once by the quietude of the place. The corner where old Mrs. Trevanard was wont to sit was empty this evening. The hearth was newly swept, as it always seemed to be, and the fire, not unacceptable on this dull grey afternoon, burned bright and red. The table was laid with a composite kind of meal, on one side a small tea-tray, on the other the ponderous Sunday sirloin and a tempting salad, a meal prepared for himself, Maurice felt sure. The maid-servant entered from the adjoining kitchen at the sound of his footsteps.



‘Oh, if you please, sir, they’re all gone to tea at Limestone Farm. Mr. Spurcombe, at Limestone, is an old friend of master’s. And missus said if you should happen to come home before they did, would you please to make yourself comfortable, and I was to lay tea for you.’

‘Your mistress hardly expected me, I suppose?’

‘I don’t think she did, sir. She said she thought you’d dine up at Penwyn, most likely.’

Maurice was not long about his evening meal. Perhaps he made shorter work of it than he might have done otherwise, perceiving that the maid was longing for the moment when she might clear the table, and slip away by the back door to her Sunday evening tryst. Maid-servants at Borcel were kept very close, and were almost always under the eye of their mistress, yet as a rule the Borcel End domestic always had her ‘young man.’ Maurice heard the back door shut, stealthily, and felt very sure that the kitchen was deserted. He drew his chair nearer to the hearth, lighted a cigar, and abandoned himself to idle thought.

## CHAPTER VIII.

‘GOOD NIGHT, GOOD REST. AH ! NEITHER BE  
MY SHARE.’

MAURICE CLISSOLD sat for some time, smoking and musing by the hearth—sat till the light faded outside the diamond-paned windows, and the shadows deepened within the room. He might have sat on longer had he not been surprised by the opening of a door in that angle of the hall which was sacred to age and infirmity in the person of old Mrs. Trevanard.

It was the door of her room which had opened. ‘Have they come back yet?’ asked her feeble old voice.

‘No, ma’am,’ answered Maurice, ‘not yet. Can I do anything for you?’

‘No, sir. It’s the strange gentleman, Mr.—  
Mr.——’

‘Clissold. Yes, ma’am. Won’t you come to your old place by the fire?’

‘No; I’ve my fire in here, thank you kindly. But the place seems lonesome when they’re away. I’m not much of a one to talk myself, but I like to hear voices. The hours seem so long without them. You can come in, if you please, sir. My room is kept pretty tidy, I believe; I should fret if I thought it wasn’t.’

The old woman was standing on the threshold of the door opening between the two rooms. Maurice had risen to offer her assistance.

‘Come in and sit down a bit,’ she said, pleased at having found some one to talk to, for it was a notorious fact at Borcel End that old Mrs. Trevanard always had a great deal more to say for herself when her daughter-in-law was out of the way than she had in the somewhat freezing presence of that admirable housewife.

Maurice complied, and entered the room which he had observed through the half-glass door, a comfortable homely room enough, in the light of an excellent fire. Old Mrs. Trevanard required a great deal of warmth.

She went back to her arm-chair, and motioned

her visitor to a seat on the other side of the hearth.

‘It’s very kind of you to be troubled with an old woman like me,’ she mumbled.

‘I dare say you could tell me plenty of interesting stories about Borcel End if you were inclined, Mrs. Trevanard,’ said Maurice.

‘Ah, there’s few houses without a history; few women of my age that haven’t seen a good deal of family troubles and family secrets. The best thing an old woman can do is to hold her tongue. That’s what my daughter-in-law’s always telling me. “Least said, soonest mended.”’

‘Ah,’ thought Maurice, ‘the dowager has been warned against being over-communicative.’

Contemplating the room more at his leisure now than he had done from outside, he perceived a picture hanging over the chimney-piece which he had not noticed before. It was a commonplace portrait enough, by some provincial limner’s hand, the portrait of a young woman in a gipsy hat and flowered damask gown—a picture that was perhaps a century old.



‘Is that picture over the chimney a portrait of one of your son’s family, ma’am?’ asked Maurice.

‘Yes. That’s my husband’s mother, Justina Trevanard.’

Justina. The name startled him—so uncommon a name—and to find it here in the Trevanard family.

‘That’s a curious name,’ he said, ‘and one which recalls a person I met under peculiar circumstances. Have you had many Justinas in the Trevanard family since that day?’

‘No, there was never anybody christened after her.’

‘I met your granddaughter in the garden the other night, Mrs. Trevanard,’ said Maurice, determined to find out whether this blind woman was a friend to Muriel, ‘and I was grieved to see her in so sad a condition.’

‘Muriel. Yes, poor girl, it’s very sad—sad for all of us,’ answered the old woman, with a sigh, ‘saddest of all for her father. He was so proud of that girl—spared no money to make her a lady, and now

he can't bear to see her. It wounds him too deep to see such a wreck. Yet he won't have her away from the house. He likes to know that she's near him, and as well cared for as she can be—in her state.'

‘It must have been a great sorrow that so changed her?’

‘It was more sorrow than she could bear, poor child; though others have borne harder things.’

‘She was crossed in love, her brother told me.’

‘Yes, yes—crossed in love, that was it. The young man that she loved died young, and she was told of it suddenly. The shock turned her brain. She had a fever, and every one thought she was going to die. She got the better of the illness, but her senses never came back to her. She's quite harmless, as you've seen, I dare say; but she has her fancies, and one is to think that the young man she was fond of is still alive, and that he'll keep his promise and come back to her.’

Maurice told Mrs. Trevanard of his first night at Borcel End, and the intrusion which had shortened his slumbers.

‘Ah, to think that she should have happened to find her way there that night, close as we keep her! My door is always locked, and she can’t get out into the house without coming through this room; but I suppose that night I must have forgotten to take the key out of the door and put it under my pillow as I do mostly. And the poor child went roaming about the house by moonlight. That’s an old trick of hers. The room where you sleep was her room once upon a time, and she always goes there if she gets the chance. It was unlucky that it should have happened the first night of your being here!’

‘She is very fond of you, I suppose,’ said Maurice, anxious to hear more of one in whom he felt a strong interest.

‘Yes, I think she likes me better than any one else now.’

‘Better even than her own mother?’

‘Why, yes, she does not get on very well with her mother; she has odd fancies about her.’

‘I thought as much. I have heard her speak of a child. That was a mere delusion, I conclude.’

‘Yes, that was one of her fancies.’

‘Has Mrs. Trevanard never consulted any medical man upon the state of her daughter’s mind?’

‘Medical man,’ repeated the old woman, dubiously. ‘You mean a doctor, I suppose? Yes; Dr. Mitchell, from Seacombe, has seen the poor child many a time, and given her physic for this, that, and the other, but he says her mind will never be any different. There’s no use worrying about that. He gives her stuff for her appetite sometimes, for she has but a poor appetite at the best. She’s sorely wasted away from the figure she was once upon a time.’

‘She was a very beautiful girl, I have heard from Martin.’

‘Yes, I never saw a handsomer girl than Muriel when she came from school. It was all along of sending her to boarding school things went wrong.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Oh dear me, sir, you mustn’t listen to my rambling talk, I’m a weak old woman, and I dare say my mind goes astray sometimes, just like Muriel’s.’



A light step sounded on the narrow stairs, a door in the paneling opened, and the figure Maurice had first seen in the spectral light of the moon came towards the hearth, and crouched down at the grandmother's knees. A slender figure, dressed in a light-coloured gown which looked white in the uncertain flare of the fire, a pale worn face, a mass of tangled hair.

Muriel took the old woman's withered hand, laid her hollow cheek against it, and kissed it fondly.

'Granny,' she murmured, 'patient, loving granny. Muriel's only friend.'

Mrs. Trevanard smoothed the dark hair with her tremulous hand.

'How tangled it is, Muriel ! Why won't you let me brush it, and keep it nice for you ? My poor old hands can do that without the help of eyes.

'Why should it be made smooth or nice ? He isn't coming back yet. See here, granny, you shall dress me the day he comes home—all in white—with myrtle in my hair, like a bride. I would

have orange blossoms if I knew where to get any. There are some orange trees up at the Manor House. I’ll ask him to bring me some. I was never dressed like a bride.’

‘Oh, Muriel, Muriel, so full of fancies!’

‘Ah! but there are some of them real—too real. Where is the old cradle that my little brother used to sleep in?’

‘I don’t know, darling. In the loft, perhaps.’

‘They should have burnt it. I peeped into the loft one day, and saw it in a corner—the old cradle. It set me thinking—such strange thoughts!’

She remained silent for a few minutes, still crouching at her grandmother’s knees, and with her hollow eyes fixed on the low fire.

‘Didn’t you hear a child cry?’ she asked, suddenly, looking up with a listening face first at the old woman, then at Maurice. ‘Didn’t you, granny?’

‘No, love. I heard nothing.’

‘Didn’t you, then?’ to Maurice.

‘No, indeed.’

‘ Ah, you are all of you deaf. I hear that crying so often—a poor little feeble voice. It comes and goes like the wind in the long winter nights, but it sounds so distant. Why doesn’t it come nearer? Why doesn’t it come close to us, that we may take the child in and comfort it? ’

‘ Ah, Muriel, Muriel, so full of fancies,’ repeated the old woman, like the burden of an ancient ballad.

The sound of doors opening, and loud voices, announced the return of the family.

‘ You’d better go back to the hall, sir. Bridget won’t like to find you here with *her*,’ said Mrs. Trevanard in a hurried whisper, pointing to the figure leaning against her knees.

Maurice obeyed without a word. His last look at Muriel showed him the great haggard eyes gazing at the fire, the wasted hands clasped upon the grandmother’s knee.

He left Borcel early next morning, Martin insisting upon bearing him company for the first few miles of his journey. He had paid liberally for his entertainment, rewarded the servant, and parted upon

excellent terms with Mr. and Mrs. Trevanard and the blind grandmother. But he saw no more of Muriel, and it was with her image that Borcel End was most associated in his mind. When he was parting with Martin he ventured to speak of her, for the first time since that conversation in the dog-cart.

‘Martin, I am going to say something which will perhaps offend you, but it is something I can’t help saying.’

‘I don’t think there’s much fear of offence between you and me—at least not on my side.’

‘I am not so sure of that ; some subjects are hazardous even between friends. You remember our talk about your sister ? Well, I have seen her twice since then, never mind how or where ; and I am more interested at her sad story than I can well express to you. It seems to me that there is something in that story which you, her only brother, ought to know, or, in a word, that she has need of your love and protection. Do not suppose for a moment that I would insinuate anything against your father and mother. They have doubtless done their duty



to her according to their lights, but it is just possible that she has need of more active friendship, more sympathetic affection, than they can give. She clings to her old grandmother—a fading succour. When old Mrs. Trevanard dies, your sister will lose a natural nurse and protector. It will be your duty to lighten that loss for her, to interpose your love between her and the sense of desolation that may then arise. You are not angry with me for saying so much?’

‘Angry with you? no, indeed! You set me thinking, that’s all. Poor Muriel! I used to be so fond of her when I was a little chap, and perhaps I have thought too little about her of late years. My mother doesn’t like any interference upon that point—doesn’t even like me to talk of my poor sister, and so I’ve got into the way of taking things for granted, and holding my tongue. Honestly, if I had thought there was anything to be done for Muriel, that she could be better off than she is, or happier than she is, I should have been the first to make the attempt to bring about that improvement. But my mother has always told me there was nothing to be done except submit to the will of Providence.’

‘Your mother may be right, Martin; it is not for me, a stranger in your home, to gainsay her. But your sister’s case seems to me most pitiful, and it will be long before I shall get her image out of my mind. If ever there should come a time when you may need the advice or the assistance of a man of the world upon that subject, be very sure my best services will be at your disposal. And whenever you come to London on business or on pleasure, remember that you are to make my home yours.’

‘I shall take you at your word. But you are more likely to come back to Borcel than I to come to London, for, mind, I count upon your coming next summer. And now you are so thick with the Manor House people you’ve some inducement for coming,’ added Martin, with the faintest touch of bitterness.

‘There is temptation enough for me at Borcel End, Martin, without any question of the Manor House.’

Martin shook his head incredulously.

‘Miss Bellingham is too pretty to be left out of the question,’ he said.

‘Miss Bellingham! A mere Dresden china

beauty, a very fine specimen of human waxwork. I have told you my adventure in that line, Martin. I'm not likely to make a second venture.'

They parted with the friendliest farewell, and Maurice felt that he was leaving something more than a chance acquaintance behind him at Borcel End.

## CHAPTER IX.

‘SUCH A LORD IS LOVE.’

NOTHING could be more perfect than that serenity which ruled the domestic life of Penwyn Manor. The judgment which Maurice Clissold had formed of that life, as seen from the outside, was fully confirmed by its inner every-day aspect. Mr. and Mrs. Penwyn had no company manners. They did not pose themselves before a stranger as model husband and wife, and settle their small differences at their leisure in the sanctuary of the lady's dressing-room or the gentleman's study. They had no differences, but lived in each other and for each other.

Yet, so impossible is perfect happiness to erring mortality, even here there was a hitch. Affection the most devoted, peace that knew not so much as a summer cloud across its fair horizon—these there



were truly—but not quite happiness. Madge Penwyn had discovered somehow, by some subtle power of intuition given to anxious wives, that the husband she loved so fondly was not altogether happy, that he had his hours of lassitude and depression, when the world seemed to him, like Hamlet's world, 'out of joint,'—his dark moments, when even she had no spell that could exorcise his demon.

Vainly she sought a cause for these changeful moods. Was he tired of her? Had he mistaken his own feelings when he chose her for his wife? No, even when most perplexed by his fitful spirits, she could not doubt his love. That revealed itself with truth's simple force. She knew him well enough to know that his love for her was the diviner half of his nature.

Once, on the eve of an event which was to complete the sacred circle of their home life, when her nature was most sensitive, and she clung to him with a pathetic dependence, Madge ventured to speak of her husband's intervals of gloom.

'I'm afraid there is something wanting even in

your life, Churchill,’ she said, gently, fearful lest she should touch some old wound—‘that you are not quite happy at Penwyn.’

‘Not happy! My dear love, if I am not happy here, and with you, there is no such thing as happiness for me. Why should I not be happy? I have no wish unfulfilled, except perhaps some dim half-formed aspiration to make my name famous—an idea with which most young men begin life, and which I can well afford to let stand over for future consideration, while I make the most of the present here with you.’

‘But, Churchill, you know that I would not stand between you and ambition. You must know how more than proud any success of yours would make me.’

‘Yes, dearest, and by and by I will put up for Seacombe, and try to make a little character in the House, for your sake,’ replied Mr. Penwyn, with a yawn. ‘It’s a wonderful thing how ambitious a man feels while he has his living to win, and only his own wits to help him. Then, indeed, the distant blast of Fame’s trumpet is a sound that wakes him

early in the morning, and keeps him at his post in the night watches. But then fame means income, position, the world's esteem, all the good things of life. The penniless struggler knows he must be Cæsar or nothing. Give the same man a comfortable estate like Penwyn, and fame becomes a mere addendum to his life, an ornament which vanity may desire, but which hardly weighs against the delight of idle days and nights that know not care. In short, darling, since I won fortune and you I have grown somewhat forgetful of the dreams I cherished when I was a struggling bachelor.'

'Is it regret for those old dreams that makes you so gloomy sometimes, Churchill?'

'I do not regret them. I regret nothing. I am not gloomy,' said Churchill, eagerly. 'Never question my happiness, Madge. Joy is a spirit too subtle to endure a doubter's analysis. God forbid that you and I should be otherwise than utterly happy. Oh, my dear love, never doubt me; let us live for each other, and let me at least be sure that I have made your life all sunshine.'

'It has never known a cloud since our betrothal,

Churchill; except when I have thought you depressed and despondent.’

‘Neither depressed nor despondent, Madge, only thoughtful. A man whose early days have been for the most part given up to thinking must have his hours of thoughtfulness now and then. And perhaps my life here has smacked a little too much of the Lotus Land. I must begin to look about me, and take more interest in the estate,—in short, follow in the footsteps of my worthy grandfather, the old Squire; as soon as I can add the respectable name of father to my qualifications for the post.’

That time came before the sickle had been put to the last patch of corn upon the uplands above Penwyn Manor. The halting bell of Penwyn Church rang out its shrill peal one August morning, and the little world within earshot of the Manor knew that the Squire rejoiced in the coming of his firstborn. There were almost as many bonfires in the district that summer night, outflaring the mellow harvest moon, as at Penzance on the eve of St. John the Evangelist. The firstborn was a son, whose advent the newspapers, local and metropolitan, duly



recorded,—‘At Penwyn Manor, August 25th, the wife of Churchill Penwyn, Esq., of a son (Nugent Churchill).’ The new-comer’s names had been settled beforehand.

‘The sweet thing,’ exclaimed Lady Cheshunt, when she read the announcement in the reading-room of a German Kursaal. ‘I feel as if she had made me a grandmother.’

And Lady Cheshunt wrote straight off to her silversmith, and ordered him to make the handsomest thing in christening cups, and sent a six-page letter to Mrs. Penwyn by the same post, requesting, in a manner that amounted to a command, that she might be represented by proxy as sponsor to the infant.

The child’s coming gave new brightness to the domestic horizon. Viola was in raptures. This young nephew was the first baby that had ever entered into the sum of her daily life. She seemed to regard him as a phenomenon; very much as grave fellows of the Zoological Society regarded the first hippopotamus born in Regent’s Park.

Madge saw no more clouds on her husband’s

brow after that gentle remonstrance of hers. Indeed, he took pains to demonstrate his perfect contentment. His naturally energetic character re-asserted itself. He threw himself heart and soul into that one ambition of the old Squire, the improvement and aggrandizement of the Penwyn estate. He made a fine road across those lonely hills, and planted the land on both sides of it with Scotch and Norwegian firs, wherever there was ground available for plantation. The young groves arose, as if by magic, giving a new charm to the face of the landscape, and a new source of revenue to the lord of the soil. Mr. Penwyn also interested himself in the mining property, and finding his agent an easy-going, incapable sort of person, took the collection of the royalty into his own hands, much to the improvement of his income. People shrugged their shoulders, and said that the new Squire was just such another as ‘Old Nick,’ meaning the late Nicholas Penwyn. But careful as he was of his own interests, Churchill did not prove himself an illiberal landlord or a bad paymaster. Those plantations and new roads of his gave employment enough

to use up all the available labour of the district, and impart new prosperity to the neighbourhood. When he suggested an improvement to a tenant he was always ready to assist in carrying it out. He renewed leases to good tenants upon the easiest terms, but was merciless in the expulsion of bad tenants. He was just one of those landlords who do most to improve the condition of an estate and the people on it, and in Ireland would inevitably have met with a violent death. The Celts of Western England took matters more quietly, abused him a good deal, owned that he was the right sort of man for the improvement of the soil, and submitted to fate which had given them King Stork, rather than King Log, for their ruler.

When the election came on, Mr. Penwyn put himself into nomination for Seacomb, and came in with flying colours. All the trading classes voted for him, out of self-interest. He had spent more money in the town than any one of his name had ever expended there. Madge's popularity secured the lower classes. Her schools were the admiration of the district, and she was raising up a model

village between Old Penwyn and the Manor House. 'Madge's Folly,' Mr. Penwyn called the pretty cluster of cottages on the slope of the hill, but he allowed his wife to draw upon his balance to any extent she pleased, and never grumbled at the builder's bills, or troubled her by suggesting that the money she was laying out was likely to produce something less than two per cent.

So Churchill Penwyn wrote himself down M.P., and might be fairly supposed to have conquered all good things which fortune could bestow upon a deserving member of Burke's Landed Gentry. He had a fair young wife, who won love and honour from all who knew her. His infant heir was esteemed a model of all that is most excellent in babyhood. His sister-in-law believed in him as the most wonderful and admirable of husbands and men. His estate prospered, his plantations grew and flourished. The vast Atlantic itself was as a lake beneath his windows, and seemed to call him lord. No cloud, were it but the bigness of a man's hand, obscured the brightness of his sky.

Mr. and Mrs. Penwyn spent their second season



in town with greater distinction than their first. More people were anxious to know them—more exalted invitation cards showered in upon them, and Churchill, who had been a successful man even in the days of his poverty, felt that he had then only tasted the skimmed milk of success, and that this which was offered to his lips to-day was the cream. There was a subtle difference in the manner of his reception by the same world now-a-days. If he had been only a country gentleman, with the ability to take a furnished house in Belgravia, the difference might have been slight enough; or, indeed, the advantage might have been on the side of the portionless barrister, with his way to make in life, and his chances of success before him. But Churchill's maiden speech had been a success. He had developed a special capacity for committees, had shown slow-going county members how to get through their work in about one-fifth of the time they had been in the habit of giving to it, had proved himself a master of railway and mining economics—in a word, without noise, or bluster, or assumption, had infused something of Transatlantic

go-a-headishness into all the business to which he put his hand. Men in high places marked him as a young man worth cultivating, and thus, before the session was over, Churchill Penwyn had tasted the firstfruits of parliamentary success.

Perhaps if ever a man went in danger of being spoiled by a wife Churchill Penwyn was that man. Madge simply worshipped him. To hear him praised, to see him honoured, was to her of all praise and honour the highest. She shaped all the circumstances of her life to suit his interest and his convenience; chose her acquaintance at his bidding, would have given up the greatest party of the season to sit by his side in the dingy Eton Square study, copying paragraphs out of a blue-book for his use and advantage. Churchill, on his side, was careful not to impose upon devotion so unselfish, and was never prouder than in assisting at his wife's small social triumphs. He chose the colours of her dresses, and took as much interest in her toilet as in the state of the mining market. He never seemed so happy as in those rare evenings which he contrived to spend alone with Madge, or in hearing

some favourite opera with her, and going quietly home afterwards to a snug little *tête-à-tête* supper, while Viola was dancing to her heart's content under the wing of some good-natured chaperon, like Lady Cheshunt.

That friendly dowager was enraptured with her *protégée's* domestic life.

‘My sweet love, you renew one’s belief in Arcadia,’ she exclaimed to Madge, after her enthusiastic fashion. ‘I positively must buy you a crook and a lamb or two to lead about with blue ribbons. You are the simplest of darlings. To see how you worship that husband of yours puts me in mind of Baucis and what’s-his-name, and all that kind of thing. And to think that I should have taken such trouble to warn you against this very man! But then who could imagine that young Penwyn would have been so good-natured as to die?’

‘When are you coming to see me at the Manor, Lady Cheshunt?’ asked Madge, laughing at her friend’s raptures. ‘You can form no fair idea of my domestic happiness in London. You must see me at home in my Arcadia, with my crook and flock.’

‘You dear child! I shall certainly come in August.’

‘I’m so glad. You must be sure to come before the twenty-fifth. That’s Nugent’s birthday, you know, and I mean to give a pastoral *fête* in honour of the occasion, and you will see all my cottagers and their children, and the rough miners, and discover what a curious kingdom we reign over in the West.’

‘My dearest love, I detest poor people, and tenants, and cottagers—but I shall come to see *you*.’



## CHAPTER X.

‘ THEN STREAMED LIFE’S FUTURE ON THE FADING  
PAST.’

MORE than a year had gone by since Maurice Clissold had said farewell to Borcel End, and he had not yet found leisure to revisit that peaceful home-stead. He had corresponded with Martin Trevanard regularly during the interval, and had heard all that was to be told of Borcel and its neighbourhood ; how Mrs. Penwyn was daily becoming more and more popular, how her schools flourished, her cottagers thrived, her cottage gardens blossomed as the rose ; and how Mr. Penwyn, though respected for his liberality and justice, and looked up to very much in his parliamentary capacity, had not yet found the knack of making himself popular. From time to time, in reply to Maurice’s inquiries, Martin had written a few words about Muriel. She was always

the same—there was no change. She was neither better nor worse, and the good old grandmother was very careful of her, and kept her from wandering about the house at night. Nothing had happened to disturb the even current of life at Borcel End.

This year that had gone had brought success, and, in some measure, fame, to Maurice Clissold. He had published the long-contemplated volume of verse, the composition whereof had been his labour and delight since he left the university. His were not verses ‘thrown off’ in the leisure half-hours of a man whose occupations were more serious—verses to be apologized for, with a touch of proud humility, in a preface. They contained the full expression of his life. They were strong with all the strength of his manhood. Passion, fervour, force, intensity, were there; and the world, rarely slow to appreciate youthful fire, was quick to recognise their real power. Maurice Clissold slowly awoke to the fact that, under his *nom de plume*, he was famous. He had taken care not to affix his real name to that confession of faith—not to let all the world know that his was that inner life which a poet reveals half uncon-

sciously, even when he writes about the shadows his fancy has created. In the story-poem which made the chief portion of his volume Maurice had, in some wise, told the story of his own passion, and his own disappointment. Pain and disallusion had given their bitter flavour to his verse ; but happily for the poet's reputation, it was just that bitter-sweet—that sub-acid, which the lovers of sentimental poetry like. That common type of womanhood, fair and lovable, and only false under the pressure of circumstance, was here represented with undeniable vigour. The modern Helen, the woman whose passive beauty and sweetness are the source of tears and death, and whom the world forgives because she is mild and fair, here found a powerful limner. He had spared not a detail of that cruel portrait. It was something better than a miniature of that one girl who had jilted him. It was the universal image of weakly, selfish womanhood, yielding, unstable, caressing, dependent, and innately false.

Side by side with this picture from life he had set the ideal woman, pure, and perfect, and true, lovely in face and form, but more lovely in mind

and soul. Between these two he had placed his hero, wayward, mistaken, choosing the poison-flower, instead of the sweet thornless rose, led through evil ways to a tragical end, comforted by the angel-woman only as chill death sealed his lips. Bitterness and sorrow were the dominant notes of the verse, but it was a pleasing bitter, and a melodious sadness.

There was a run on Mudie’s for ‘ A Life Picture, and other Poems,’ by Clifford Hawthorn. The book was widely reviewed, but while some critics hailed the bard as that real poet for whom the age had been waiting, others dissected the pages with a merciless scalpel, and denounced the writer as a profligate and an infidel. The fugitive pieces, brief lyrics some of them, with the delicate finish of a cabinet picture, won almost universal favour. In a word Maurice Clissold’s first venture was a success.

He was not unduly elated. He did not believe in himself as the poet for whom the expectant age had been on the look-out. He had measured himself against giants, and was pretty clear in his



estimate of his own powers. This pleasant taste of the strong wine of success made him only more intent upon doing better. It stimulated ambition, rather than satisfied it. Perhaps the adverse criticism did him most good, for it created just that spirit of opposition which is the best incentive to effort.

Very happy was the bachelor-poet's life in those days. He had lived just long enough to survive the pain of his first disappointment. It was a bitter memory still, but a memory which but rarely recurred to mar his peace. He had friends who understood him—two or three real friends, who with his publisher alone knew the secret of his authorship. He had an occupation he loved, just enough ambition to give a stimulus to life, and he had not a care.

He had visited the Penwyns in Eton Square several times during the course of the season, but he had been careful not to go to that very pleasant house too often. Afternoon tea in Mrs. Penwyn's drawing-room—the smaller drawing-room, with its wealth of flowers, was a most delightful manner of wasting an hour or so. But Maurice felt somehow

that it was an indulgence he must not give himself too often. He had a lurking fear of Viola. She was very fair, and sweet and gentle, like the girl he had loved, and though he had, as yet, regarded her with only the most fraternal feeling—nay, a sentiment approaching indifference,—he had an idea that there might be peril in too much friendliness.

Dropping in one afternoon at the usual hour, he was pleased to see his own book on one of the gipsy tables.

‘ Have you read this “ Life Picture,” which the critics have been abusing so vigorously ? ’ he asked.

‘ Yes, I saw it dreadfully cut up in the *Saturday Review*, so I thought it must be nice, and sent to the publishers for a copy,’ answered Madge. ‘ I’ve had it down on my Mudie’s list ever so long, without effect. It’s a wonderful book. Viola and I were up till three o’clock this morning reading it together. Neither of us could wait. From the moment we began with that picture of a London twilight, and the two girls and the young lawyer sitting in a balcony talking, we were riveted. It is

all so easy, so lifelike, so full of vigour and freshness and colour.'

'The author would be very much flattered if he could hear you,' said Maurice.

'The author—oh, I'm afraid he must be rather a disagreeable person. He seems to have such a bad opinion of women.'

'Oh, Madge, his heroine is a noble creature!' cried Viola.

'Yes, but the woman his hero loves best is worthless.'

'Well, I should like to know the author,' said Viola.

'I don't think Churchill would get on very well with him,' said Madge. And that to her mind made an end of the question.

The only people she sought were people after Churchill's own heart. This poet had a wildness in his ideas which the Squire of Penwyn would hardly approve.

\* \* \* \* \*

Among Mr. Clissold's literary acquaintance was a clever young dramatic author, whose work was

just beginning to be popular. One afternoon at the club—a rather Bohemian institution for men of letters, in one of the streets of the Strand—this gentleman—Mr. Flittergilt—invited Maurice to assist at the first performance of his last comedietta at a small and popular theatre near at hand.

They dined together, and dropped in at the theatre just as the curtain was falling on a half-hour farce played while the house was filling. The piece of the evening came next. ‘No Cards,’ an original comedy in three acts; which announcement was quite enough to convince Maurice that the motive was adapted from Scribe, and the comic underplot conveyed from a Palais Royal farce.

‘There’s a new girl in my piece,’ said Mr. Flittergilt, on the tiptoe of expectation, ‘such a pretty girl, and by no means a bad actress.’

‘Where does she come from?’

‘Goodness knows. It’s her first appearance in London.’

‘Humph, comes to the theatre in her brougham, I suppose, and has her dresses made by Worth.’

‘Not the least in the world. She wore a shabby



grey thing, which I believe you call alpaca, at rehearsal this morning, and she ran into the theatre, dripping like a naiad, in a waterproof—if you can imagine a naiad in a waterproof—having failed to get a seat in a twopenny omnibus.'

'That is the prologue,' said Maurice, with a slight shoulder-shrug. 'Perhaps Madge was right, and that he really had a bad opinion of women.'

He turned to the programme listlessly presently, and read the old names he knew so well, for this house was a favourite lounge of his.

'Is the piece really original, Jack?' he inquired of his friend.

'Well,' said Mr. Flittergilt, pulling on a new glove, and making a wry face, perhaps at the tightness of the glove—perhaps at the awkwardness of the question—'I admit there was a germ in that last piece at the Vaudeville, which I have ripened and expanded, you know. There always is a germ, you see, Maurice. It's only from the brains of a Jove that you get a full-grown Minerva at a rush.'

'I understand. The piece is a clever adaptation. Why, what's this?'

It was a name in the programme which evoked that sudden question.

‘Celia Flower, Miss Justina Elgood.’

‘Flittergilt,’ said Maurice, solemnly, ‘I know that young woman, and I regret to inform you that, though really a superior girl in private life, she is a very poor actress. If the fortunes of your piece are entrusted to her, I am sorry for you.’

‘If she acts as well to-night as she did this morning at rehearsal, I shall be satisfied,’ replied Mr. Flittergilt. ‘But how did you come to know her?’

Maurice told the story of those two days at Eborsham. ‘Poor child, when last I saw her she was bowed down with grief for my murdered friend. I dare say she has forgotten all about him by this time.’

‘She doesn’t look like a girl who would easily forget,’ said the dramatist.

The curtain rose on one of those daintily furnished interiors which the modern stage realizes to such perfection. Flowers, birds, statuettes, pictures, a glimpse of sunlit garden on one side, and an open

piano on the other. A girl was seated on the central ottoman, looking over a photograph album. A young man was in a half-recumbent position at her feet, looking up at her. The girl was Justina Elgood—the old Justina, and yet a new Justina—so wondrously had the overgrown girl of seventeen improved in womanly beauty and grace. The dark blue eyes, with their depth of thought and tenderness of expression, were alone unchanged. Maurice could have recognised the girl anywhere by those eyes.

The management had provided the costumes for the piece, and Justina, in her white silk dress, with its voluminous frills and flouncings, looked as elegant a young woman as one could desire to see offered up, Iphigenia-like, on the altar of loyalty at St. James's Palace, to be almost torn to pieces on a drawing-room day. Celia Flower is the heroine of the comedy, and this is her wedding morning, and this young man at her feet is a cousin and rejected lover. She is looking over the portraits of her friends, in order to determine which she shall preserve and which drop after marriage.

Mr. Flittergilt’s comedy goes on to show that Celia’s intended union is altogether a mistake, that she really loves the rejected cousin, that he honestly loves her, that nothing but misery can result from the marriage of interest which has been planned by Celia’s relatives.

Celia is at first indifferent and frivolous, thinking more of her bridal toilet than of the bond which it symbolizes. Little by little she awakens to deeper thought and deeper feeling, and here, slender as Mr. Flittergilt’s work is, there is scope for the highest art.

Curiously different is the actress of to-day from the girl whose ineptitude the strolling company at Eborsham had despised. There is a brightness and spontaneity about her comedy, a simple artless tenderness in her touches of sentiment, which show the untaught actress—the actress whose art has grown out of her own depth of feeling, whose acting is the outcome of a rich and thoughtful mind rather than the hard and dry result of tuition and study, or the mechanical art of imitation. Impulse and fancy give their bright brief flashes of light and



colour to the interpretation, and the dramatist's creation lives and moves before the audience,—not a mere mouthpiece for smart sayings or graceful bits of sentiment—but a being with a soul, an original absolute creation of an original mind.

The audience are enchanted, Mr. Flittergilt is in fits of admiration of himself and the actress. 'By Jove, that girl is as good as Nesbitt, and my dialogue is equal to Sheridan's!' he ejaculates, when the first act is over, and the rashly enthusiastic, without waiting for the end, begin to clamour for the author. And Maurice—well, Maurice sits in a brown study, far back in the box, and unseen by the actors, astride upon his chair, his arms folded upon the back of it, his chin upon his folded arms, the image of intense contemplation.

'By heaven, the girl is a genius,' he says to himself. 'I thought there was something noble about her, but I did not think two short years would work such a change as this.'

At the end of the piece Justina was received with what it is the fashion to call an ovation. There were no bouquets thrown to her, for these floral

offerings are generally pre-arranged by the friends and admirers of an actress, and Justina had neither friends nor admirers in all the great city to plan her triumph. She had conquered by the simple force of an art which was spontaneous and unstudied as the singing of a nightingale. Time and practice had made her mistress of the mechanism of her art, had familiarized her with the glare of the lights and the strange faces of the crowd, had made her as much at her ease on the stage as in her own room. The rest had come unawares, it had come with the ripening of her mind, come with the thoughtfulness and depth of feeling that had been the growth of that early disappointment, that first brief dream of love, with its sad sudden ending.

When the piece was over, and Justina and Mr. Flittergilt had enjoyed their triumph, and all the actors had been called for and applauded by a delighted audience, Maurice suddenly left the box. He had done nothing to help the applause, but had stood in his dark corner like a rock, while the little theatre shook with the plaudits of pit and gallery.

‘ Come, I say, that’s rather cool,’ the dramatist

muttered to himself. 'He might have said something civil, anyhow; I was just going to ask him if he'd like to go behind the scenes, too.' The accomplished Flittergilt had contented himself with bowing from his box, and he was now in haste to betake himself to the green-room, there to receive the congratulations of the company, and to render the usual meed of praise and thanks to the interpreters of his play.

The green-room at the Royal Albert Theatre was a very superior apartment to the green-room at Eborsham. It was small, but bright and comfortable-looking, with carpeted floor, looking-glasses over chimney-piece and console table, photographs and engraved portraits of popular actors and actresses upon the gaily papered walls, a cushioned divan all round the room, and nothing but the table and its appurtenances wanted to make the apartment resemble a billiard-room in a pleasant unpretentious country house.

Here, standing by the console table, and evidently quite at his ease, Mr. Flittergilt found his friend talking to the new actress. Mr. Clissold had

penetrated to the sacred chamber somehow, without the dramatist's safe-conduct.

'How did you get here?' asked Flittergilt, annoyed.

'Oh, I hardly know. The old man at the stage door didn't want to admit me. I'm afraid I said I was Miss Elgood's brother, or something of that kind, I was so desperately anxious to see her.'

He had been congratulating Justina on her developed talents. The girl's success had surprised herself more than any one else. She had been applauded and praised by provincial critics of late, but she had not thought that a London audience was so easily conquered. The dark eyes shone with a new light, for success was very sweet. In the background stood a figure that Maurice had not observed till just now, when he made way for Mr. Flittergilt.

This was Matthew Elgood, clad in the same greasy-looking frock coat, or just such a coat as that which he had worn two years ago at Eborsham, but smartened by an expanse of spotless shirt-front, which a side view revealed to be only frontage, and not an integral part of his shirt, and a purple satin cravat.



‘How do you do, Mr. Elgood? Are you engaged here too?’ asked Maurice.

‘No, sir. There was no opening for a man of my standing. The pieces which are popular now-a-days are too flimsy to afford an opening for an actor of weight, or else they are one-part pieces written for some mannerist of the hour. The genuine old legitimate school of acting—the school which was fostered in the good old provincial theatres—is nowhere now-a-days. I bow to the inevitable stroke of Time. I was born some twenty years too late. I ought to have been the compeer of Macready.’

‘Your daughter has been fortunate in making such a hit.’

‘Ay, sir. The modern stage is a fine field for a young woman with beauty and figure, and when that young woman’s talents have been trained and fostered by a man who knows his art, she enters the arena with the assurance of success. There was a time when the malignant called my daughter a stick. There was a time when my daughter hated the profession. But my fostering care has wrought the change which surprises you to-night. A

dormant genius has been awakened—I will not venture to say by a kindred genius, lest the remark should savour of egotism.’

‘You are without occupation, then, in London, Mr. Elgood?’

‘Yes, Mr. Clissold, but I have my vocation; I am here as guardian and protector of my innocent child.’

‘I told Miss Elgood two years ago that, if ever she came to London and needed a friend, my best services should be at her disposal. But her success of to-night has made her independent of friendship.’

‘I don’t know about that, Mr. Clissold. You are a literary man, I understand, a friend of Mr. Flittergilt’s, and you have doubtless some influence with dramatic critics. One can never have too much help of that kind. There is a malevolent spirit in the press which requires to be soothed and overcome by friendly influences. Beautiful, gifted as my daughter is, I feel by no means sure of the newspapers. Our unpretending domicile is at No. 27, Hudspeth Street, Bloomsbury, a lowly but a central locality. If you will favour us with a

call I shall be delighted. Our Sunday evenings are our own.'

'I shall lose no time in availing myself of your kind permission,' said Maurice; and then he added in a lower tone, for Mr. Elgood's ear only, 'I hope your daughter has got over the grief which that dreadful event at Eborsham occasioned her.'

'She has recovered from the blow, sir, but she has not forgotten it. A curiously sensitive child, Mr. Clissold. Who could have supposed that so brief an acquaintance with your murdered friend could have produced so deep an impression upon that young mind? She was never the same girl afterwards. From that time she seemed to me to dwell apart from us all, in a world of her own. She became after a while more attentive to her professional duties—more anxious to excel—more interested in the characters she represented, and she began to surprise us all by touches of pathos which we had not expected from her. She engaged with Mr. Tilberry, of the Theatre Royal, Westborough, for the juvenile lead about six months after your young friend's death, and has maintained a leading position

in the provinces ever since. “Sweet are the uses of adversity, which, like the toad,” &c. Her genius seemed to have been called into being by sorrow. Good night, Mr. Clissold. I dare say Justina will be ready to go home by this time. If you *can* square any of the critics for us, you will discover that Matthew Elgood knows the meaning of the word gratitude.’

Maurice promised to do his best, and that evening at his club near the Strand, used all the influence he had in Justina’s favour. He found his task easy. The critics who had seen Mr. Flittergilt’s new comedy were delighted with the new actress. Those who had been elsewhere, assisting at the production of somebody else’s new piece, heard their brothers of the pen enthusiastic in their encomiums, and promised to look in at the Royal Albert Theatre on Monday.

To-night was Saturday. Maurice promised himself that he would call in Hudspeth Street to-morrow evening. He had another engagement, but it was one that could be broken without much offence. And he was curious to see the successful actress at home. Was she much changed from the



girl he had surprised on her knees by the clumsy old arm-chair, shedding passionate tears for James Penwyn's death? He had thought her half a child in those days, and the possibilities of fame whereof he had spoken so consolingly very far away. And behold! she was famous already—in a small way, perhaps, but still famous. On Monday the newspapers would be full of her praises. She would be more immediately known to the world than he, the poet, had made himself yet. And she had already tasted the sweetness of applause coming straight from the hearts and hands of her audience, not filtered through the pens of critics, and losing considerable sweetness in the process.

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The illimitable regions of Bloomsbury have room enough for almost every diversity of domicile, from the stately mansions of Russell Square to the lowly abode of the mechanic and the charwoman. Hudspeeth Street is an old-fashioned, narrow street of respectable and substantial-looking houses, which must once have been occupied by the professional classes, or have served as the private dwellings of

wealthy traders, but which now are for the most part let off in floors to the shabby-genteel and struggling section of humanity, or to more prosperous mechanics, who ply their trades in the sombre paneled rooms, with their tall mantel-boards and deep-set windows.

The street lies between the oldest square of this wide district and a busy thoroughfare, where the costermongers have it all their own way after dark ; but Hudspeth Street wears at all times a tranquil gloom, as if it had been forgotten somehow by the majority, and left behind in the general march of progress. Other streets have burst out into stucco, and masked their aged walls with fronts of plaster, as ancient dowagers hide their wrinkles under Bloom de Ninon or Blanc de Rosati. But here the dingy old brick façades remain undisturbed, the old carved garlands still decorate the doorways, the old extinguishers still stand ready to quench torches that have gone to light the dark corridors of Hades.

To Maurice Clissold on this summer evening—Sunday evening, with the sound of many church bells filling the air—Hudspeth Street seems a social study, a place worth half an hour’s thought from a

philosophical lounge, a place which must have its memories.

No. 27 is cleaner and brighter of aspect than its immediate neighbours. A brass plate upon the door announces that Louis Charlevin, artist in buhl and marqueterie, occupies the ground-floor. Another plate upon the doorpost bears the name of Miss Girdleston, teacher of music; and a third is inscribed with the legend, Mrs. Mapes, Furnished Lodgings, and has furthermore a little hand pointing to a bell, which Maurice rings.

The door is opened by a young person, who is evidently Mrs. Mapes's daughter. Her hair is too elaborate, her dress too smart, her manner too easy for a servant under Mrs. Mapes's dominion. She believes that Mr. Elgood is at home, and begs the visitor to step up to the second floor front, not troubling herself to precede and announce him.

Maurice obeys, and speeds with light footstep up the dingy old staircase. The house is clean and neat enough, but has not been painted for the last thirty years, he opines. He taps lightly at the door and some one bids him enter. Mr. Elgood is lying

on a sofa, smoking luxuriously, with a glass of cold punch on the little table at his elbow. The Sunday papers lie around him. He has been reading the records of Justina’s success, and is revelling in the firstfruits of prosperity.

Justina is sitting by an open window, dressed in some pale lavender-hued gown, which sets off the tall and graceful figure. Her head leans a little back against the chintz cushion of the high-backed chair, an open book lies on her lap. It falls as she rises to receive the visitor, and Maurice stoops to pick it up.

His own poem.

It gives him more pleasure, somehow, to find it in her hands than he derived from the praises of those two fashionable and accomplished women, Mrs. Penwyn and her sister. It touches him more deeply still to see that Justina’s cheeks are wet with tears.

‘She has been crying over some foolish poetry, instead of thanking Providence for such criticism as this,’ said Mr. Elgood, slapping his hand upon the *Sunday Times*.



## CHAPTER XI.

‘A MERRIER HOUR WAS NEVER WASTED THERE.’

AUGUST came—a real August—with cloudless blue skies, and scorching noontides, and a brief storm now and then to clear the atmosphere. The yellow corn-fields basked in the sun's hot rays, scarce stirred to a ripple by the light summer air. The broad Atlantic seemed placid as that great jasper sea men picture in their dreams of heaven. The pine trees stood up straight and dark and tall and solemn against a background of azure sky. Ocean's wide waste of waters brought no sense of coolness to the parched wayfarer, for all that vast expanse glowed like burnished gold beneath the splendour of the sun-god. The road across the purple moor glared whitely between its fringe of plantations, and the flower-gardens at Penwyn Manor made patches of vivid colour in the distance. The birthday of the

heir had come and gone, with many bonfires, sky-rockets, much rejoicing of tenants and peasantry, eating and drinking, bounties to the poor, speechifying, and general exultation. At twelve months old Churchill Penwyn's heir, if not quite the paragon his parents and his aunt believed him, was fairly worth some amount of rejoicing. He was a sturdy, broad-shouldered little fellow, with chestnut locks cut straight across his wide, fair forehead, and large blue eyes, dark, and sweet, and truthful, a loving, generous-hearted little soul, winning the love of all creatures—from the grave, thoughtful father who secretly worshipped him, to the kitten that rolled itself into a ball of soft white fur in his baby lap.

The general rejoicings for tenants and cottagers, the public celebration, as it were, of the infant's first anniversary, being happily over, with satisfaction to all—even to the Irish reapers, who were regaled with supper and unlimited whisky punch in one of the big barns—Mrs. Penwyn turned her attention to more refined assemblies. Lady Cheshunt was at Penwyn, and had avowed herself actually charmed with the gathering of the vulgar herd.

‘My dear, they are positively refreshing in their absolute *naïveté*,’ she exclaimed, when she talked over the day’s proceedings with Madge and Viola in Mrs. Penwyn’s dressing-room. ‘To see the colours they wear, and the unsophisticated width of their boots, and scantiness of their petticoats, and the way they perspire, and get ever so red in the face without seeming to mind it; and the primitive way they have of looking really happy—it is positively like turning over a new leaf in the book of life.’ And when one can see it all without any personal exertion, sitting under a dear old tree and drinking iced claret cup—how admirably your people make claret cup!—it is intensely refreshing.’

‘I hope you will often turn over new leaves, then, dear Lady Cheshunt,’ Madge answered, smiling.

‘And on Thursday you are going to give a dinner party, and show me the genteel aborigines, the country people; benighted creatures who have no end of quarterings on their family shields, and never wear a decently cut gown, and drive horses that look as if they had been just taken from the plough.’

‘I don’t know that our Cornish friends are quite so lost in the night of ages as you suppose them,’ said Madge, laughing. ‘Brunel has brought them within a day’s journey of civilization, you know. They may have their gowns made in Bond Street without much trouble.’

‘Ah, my love, these are people who go to London once in three years, I dare say. Why, to miss a single season in town is to fall behind one’s age; one’s ideas get mouldy and moss-grown; one’s sleeves look as if they had been made in the time of George the Third. To keep abreast with the march of time one must be at one’s post always. One might as well be the sleeping beauty at once, and lose a hundred years, as skip the London season. I remember one year that I was out of health, and those tiresome doctors sent me to spend my spring and summer in Germany. When I came to London in the following March, I felt like Rip Van Winkle. I hardly remembered the names of the Ministry, or the right use of asparagus tongs. However, sweet child, I shall be amused to see your county people.’

The county families assembled a day or two



afterwards, and proved not unintelligent, as Lady Cheshunt confessed afterwards, though their talk was for the most part local, or of field sports. The ladies talked chiefly of their neighbours. Not scandal by any means. That would have been most dangerous; for they could hardly have spoken of any one who was not related by cousinship or marriage with somebody present. But they talked of births, and marriages, and deaths, past or to come; of matrimonial engagements, of children, of all simple, social, domestic subjects; all which Lady Cheshunt listened to wonderingly. The flavour of it was to the last degree insipid to the metropolitan worldling. It was like eating whitebait without cayenne or lemon—whitebait that tasted only of frying-pan and batter. The young ladies talked about curâtes, point lace, the penny readings of last winter, amateur concerts, new music—ever so old in London—and the school children; or, grouped round Viola, listened with awful interest to her descriptions of the season's dissipations—the balls, and flower shows, and races, and regattas she had assisted at, the royal

personages she had beheld, the various *on dits* current in London society about those royal personages, so fresh and sparkling, and, if not true, at least possessing a richness of detail that seemed like truth. Viola was eminently popular among the younger branches of the county families. The sons played croquet and billiards with her, the daughters copied the style of her dresses, and chose their new books and music at her recommendation. Mrs. Penwyn was popular with all—matrons and maidens, elderly squires and undergraduates, rich and poor. She appealed to the noblest and widest feelings of human nature, and not to love her would have been to be indifferent to virtue and sweetness.

This first dinner after the return to Penwyn Manor was more or less of a state banquet. The Manor House put forth all its forces. The great silver-gilt cups, and salvers, and ponderous old wine-coolers, and mighty venison dishes, a heavy load for a strong man, emerged from their customary retirement in shady groves of green baize. The buffet was set forth as at a royal feast; the long dinner-

table resembled a dwarf forest of stephanotis and tremulous dewy-looking fern. The closed venetians excluded the glow of a crimson sunset, yet admitted evening's refreshing breeze. The many tapers twinkled with a tender subdued radiance. The moon-like Silber lamps on the sideboard and mantel-piece gave a tone of coolness to the room. The women in their gauzy dresses, with family jewels glittering star-like upon white throats and fair round arms, or flashing from coils of darkest hair, completed the pleasant picture. Churchill Penwyn looked down the table with his quiet smile.

‘After all, conventional, commonplace, as this sort of thing may be, it gives one an idea of power,’ he thought, in his half-cynical way, ‘and is pleasant enough for the moment. Sardanapalus, with a nation of slaves under his heel, could only have enjoyed the same kind of sensation on a larger scale.’

## CHAPTER XII.

‘IT WAS THE HOUR WHEN WOODS ARE COLD.’

WHILE the Squire of Penwyn surveyed his flower and fern-bedecked board, and congratulated himself that he was a power in the land, his lodge-keeper, the woman with tawny skin, sun-browned almost to mahogany colour, dark brows and night-black eyes, sat at her door-step watching the swiftly changing splendours of the west, where the sky was still glorious with the last radiance of the sunken sun. The crimson light glows on the brown skin, and gleams in the dusky eyes as the woman sits with her face fronting westward.

She has a curious fancy for out-of-door life, and is not often to be found inside the comfortable lodge. She prefers the door-step to an arm-chair by the hearth, even in winter; nay, she has been seen to sit at her threshold, with a shawl over her head,



during a pitiless storm, watching the lightning with those bright bold eyes of hers. Her grandchild Elspeth has the same objection to imprisonment within four walls. She has no gates to open, and can roam where she lists. She avails herself of that privilege without stint, and wanders from dawn till sunset, and sometimes late into the starry night. She has resisted all Mrs. Penwyn's kind attempts to beguile her along the road to knowledge by the easy steps of the parish school. She will not sit among the rosy-cheeked Cornish children, or walk to church with the neatly-clad procession from the Sunday school. She is more ignorant than the small toddlers of three or four, can neither read nor write, hardly knows the use of a needle, and in the matter of Scriptural and theological knowledge is a very heathen.

If these people had not been the Squire's *protégées* they would have been dismissed from orderly Penwyn long ere now. They were out of harmony with their surroundings, they made a discordant note in the calm music of life at the Manor. While all else was neatness, exquisite cleanliness,

the lodge had a look of neglect, a slovenliness which struck the observer's eye disagreeably—a curtain hanging awry at one of the lattices, a tattered garment flying like a pennant from an open casement, a trailing branch of jessamine, a handleless jug standing on a window-sill, a muddy door-step. Trifles like these annoyed Mrs. Penwyn, and she had more than once reproved the lodge-keeper for her untidiness. The woman had heard her quietly enough, had uttered no insolent word, and had curtsied low as the lady of the mansion passed on. But the dark face had been shadowed by a sullen frown, and no amendment had ever followed Mrs. Penwyn's remonstrances.

‘I really wish you would get rid of those people at the north lodge,’ Madge said to Churchill, one day, after having her patience peculiarly tried by the spectacle of a ragged blanket hanging to dry in the lodge garden. ‘They make our grounds look like some Irish squireen's place, where the lodge-keeper is allowed a patch of potatoes and a drying-ground for the family linen at the park gates. If they are really objects of charity, it would be better to

allow them a pension, and let them live where they like.'

'We will think about it, my love, when I have a little more time on my hands,' answered Mr Penwyn.

He never said an absolute 'No' to his wife; but a request which had to be thought about by him was rarely granted.

Madge gave an impatient sigh. These people at the lodge exercised her patience severely.

'Waiting till you have leisure seems absurd, Churchill,' she said. 'With your parliamentary work, and all that you have to see to here, there can be no such thing as spare time. Why, not send these people away at once? They make the place look horribly untidy.'

'I'll remonstrate with them,' replied Churchill.

'And then they are such queer people,' continued Madge. 'That girl Elspeth is as ignorant as a South Sea Islander, and I dare say the grandmother is just as bad. They never go to church, setting such a shocking example to the villagers.'

'My love, there are many respectable people who

never go to church. I rarely went myself in my bachelor days. I used to reserve Sunday morning for my arrears of correspondence.’

‘Oh, Churchill!’ cried Madge, with a shocked look.

‘My dearest love, you know I do not set up for exalted virtue.’

‘Churchill!’ she exclaimed, tenderly, but still with that shocked look. She loved him so much better than herself that she would have liked heaven to be a certainty for him even at the cost of a cycle in purgatory for her.

‘Come, dear, you know I have never pretended to be a good man. I do the best I can with my opportunities, and try to be as much use as I can in my generation.’

‘But you call yourself a Christian, Churchill?’ she asked, solemnly. Their life had been so glad, so bright, so busy, so full of action and occupation, that they had seldom spoken of serious things. Never till this moment had Madge asked her husband that simple, solemn question.

He turned from her with a clouded face, turned



from her impatiently even, and walked to the other end of the room.

‘If there is one thing I hate more than another, Madge, it is theological argumentation,’ he said, shortly.

‘There is no argument here, Churchill ; a man is or is not a follower of Christ.’

‘Then I am not,’ he said.

She shrank away from him as if he had struck her, looked at him for a few moments with a pale agonized face, and left him without a word. She could not trust herself to speak—the blow had been too sudden, too heavy. She went away to her own room and shut herself in, and wept for him and prayed for him. But she loved him not the less because by his own lips he stood confessed an infidel. That was how she interpreted his words of self-condemnation. She forgot that a man may believe in Christ, yet not follow Him: believe, like the devils, and, like the devils, tremble.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Penwyn never spoke to her husband of the people at the north lodge after this. They were

associated with a too painful memory. Churchill, however, did not forget to reprove the lodge-keeper's slovenliness, and his brief and stern remonstrance had some effect. The lodge was kept in better order, at least so far as its external appearance went. Within it was still a disorderly den.

The lodgekeeper's name was Rebecca—by this name at least she was known at Penwyn. Whether she possessed the distinction of a surname was a moot point. She had not condescended to communicate it to any one at the Manor. She had been at Penwyn nearly two years, and had not made a friend—nay, not so much as an acquaintance who cared to ‘pass the time of day’ as he went by her door. The peasantry secretly thought her a witch, a dim belief in witchcraft and wise women still lingering in nooks and corners of this remote romantic West, despite the printing press and the School Board. The women-servants were half disposed to share that superstition. Everybody avoided her. Unpopularity so obvious seemed a matter of supreme indifference to the woman who called herself Rebecca. Certain creature comforts were needful to her well-

being, and these she had in abundance. The sun and the air were indispensable to her content. These she could enjoy unhindered. Her ruling vice was slothfulness, her master passion love of ease. These she could indulge. She therefore enjoyed as near an approach to positive happiness as mere animal mankind can feel. Love of man or of God, the one divine spark which lights our clay, shone not here. She had a vague sense of kindred which made some kind of tie between her and her own flesh and blood, but she had never known what it was to love anything. She kept her grandchild, Elspeth, gave her food, and raiment, and shelter—first, because what she gave cost her nothing; and secondly, because Elspeth ran errands for her, carried a certain stone bottle to be filled and refilled at the little inn in Penwyn village, did whatever work there was to be done in the lodge, and saved her grandmother trouble generally. The delicious laziness of the lodgekeeper's days would have been less perfect without Elspeth's small services; otherwise it would have given this woman little pain to know that Elspeth was shelterless and starving.

She sat and watched the light fade yonder over the lake-like sea, and heavy mists steal up the moorlands as the day died. Presently, sure that no one would come to the gates at this hour, she drew a short blackened clay pipe from her pocket, filled and lighted it, and began to smoke—slowly, luxuriously, dreamily—if so mindless a being could dream.

She emptied her pipe, and filled again, and smoked on, happy, while the moon showed silver-pale in the opal sky. The opal faded to grey; the grey deepened to purple; the silver shield grew brighter while she sat there, and the low murmur of summer waves made a soothing music—soft, slow, dreamily monotonous. The brightening moon shone full upon that moorland track by which Maurice Clissold first came to Penwyn Manor. In making his road across the uplands, the Squire had not followed this narrow track. The footpath still remained, at some distance from the road.

Turning her eyes lazily towards this path, Rebecca was startled by the sight of a figure approaching slowly in the moonlight, a man, broad-shouldered, stalwart, walking with that careless freedom of gait



which betokens the habitual pedestrian, the wanderer who has tramped over many a hill-side, and traversed many a stony road, a nomad by instinct and habit.

He came straight on, without pause or uncertainty, came straight to the gate, and looked in at the woman sitting on the door-step.

‘Ah!’ he said, ‘it was the straight tip Josh Collins gave me. Good evening, mother.’

The woman emptied the ashes of her pipe upon the door-step before she answered this filial greeting. Then she looked up at the wanderer frowningly.

‘What brings you here?’

‘There’s a heartless question!’ cried the man. ‘What brings a son to look after his blessed old mother? Do you allow nothing for family feeling?’

‘Not in you, Paul, or any of your breed. What brought you here?’

‘You’d better let me in first, and give me something to eat and drink. I don’t care about looking through iron bars, like a wild beast in Wombwell’s show.’

Rebecca hesitated—looked at her son doubtfully for a minute or so before she made up her mind to admit him, weighed the possibilities of the case, and then took her key and unlocked the gate. If it had been practicable to keep this returned prodigal outside without peril to herself, she would have done it, but she knew her son’s disposition too well to trifle with feelings which were apt to express themselves with a savage freedom.

‘Come in,’ she said, sulkily, ‘and eat your fill, and go your ways when you’ve eaten. It was an ill wind for me that blew you this way.’

‘That’s not over-kind from a mother,’ responded the nomad, carelessly. ‘I’ve had work enough to find you since you gave us the slip at Westerham fair.’

‘You might have been content to lose me,’ considering the little store you ever set by me,’ retorted Rebecca, bitterly.

‘Well, perhaps I might have brought myself to look at it in that light, if I hadn’t heard of you two or three months ago from a mate of mine in the broom trade, who happened to pass this way last

summer, and saw you here, squatting in the sun like a toad. He made a few inquiries about you—out of friendliness to me—in the village yonder, and heard that you were living on the fat of the land, and had enough to spare. Living in service—you, that were brought up to something better than taking any man's wages—and eating the bread of dependence. So I put two and two together, and thought perhaps you'd contrived to save a little bit of money by this time, and would help me with a pound or two if I looked you up. It would be hard lines if a mother refused help to her son.'

'You treated me so well when we were together that I ought to be very fond of you, no doubt,' said Rebecca. 'Come in, and eat. I'll give you a meal and a night's lodging if you like, but I'll give you no more, and you'd better make yourself scarce soon after daybreak. My master is a magistrate, and has no mercy on tramps.'

'Then how did he come to admit you into his service? You hadn't much of a character from your last place, I take it.'

'He had his reasons.'

‘ Ay, there’s a reason for everything. I should like to know the reason of your getting such a berth as this, I must say.’

He followed his mother into the lodge. The room was furnished comfortably enough, but dirt and disorder ruled the scene. Of this, however, the wanderer’s eye took little note as he briefly surveyed the chamber, dimly lighted by a single tallow candle burning in a brass candlestick on the mantelpiece. He flung himself into the high-backed Windsor arm-chair, drew it to the table, and sat there waiting for refreshment, his darkly bright eyes following Rebecca’s movements as she took some dishes from a cupboard, and set them on the board without any previous ceremony in the way of spreading a cloth or clearing the litter of faded cabbage-leaves and stale crusts which encumbered one side of the table.

The tramp devoured his meal ravenously, and said not a word till the cravings of hunger were satisfied. At the rate he eat this result was quickly attained, and he pushed away the empty dish with a satisfied sigh.

‘ That’s the first hearty feed I’ve had for a week,’



he said. 'A snack of bread and cheese and a mug of beer at a roadside public has had to serve me for breakfast and dinner and supper, and a man of my stamina can't live on bread and cheese. And now tell me all about yourself, mother, and how you came into this comfortable berth, plenty to eat and drink and nothing to do.'

'That's my business, Paul,' answered the woman, with a dogged air which meant resistance.

'Come, you needn't make a secret of it. Do you suppose I haven't brains enough to find out for myself, if you refuse to tell me? It isn't every day in the year that a fine gentleman and a lady take a gipsy fortune-teller into their service. Such things are not done without good reason. What sort of a chap is this Squire Penwyn?'

'I've nothing to tell you about him,' answered the woman, with the same steady look.

'Oh, you're as obstinate as ever, I see. All the winds that blow across the Atlantic haven't blown your sullen temper out of you. Very well, since you're so uncommunicative, suppose I tell you something about this precious master of yours. There

are other people who know him—people who are not afraid to answer a civil question. His name is Penwyn, and he is the first cousin of that poor young fellow who was murdered at Eborsham, and by that young man’s death he comes into this property. Rather a lucky thing for him, wasn’t it, that his cousin was shot from behind a hedge? If such luck had happened to a chap of my quality, a rogue and vagabond bred and born, there’d have been people in the world malicious enough to say that I had a hand in the murder. But who could suspect a gentleman like Mr. Penwyn? No gentleman would shoot his cousin from behind a hedge, even though the cousin stood between him and ever so many thousands a year.’

‘I don’t know what you mean by your sneers,’ returned Rebecca. ‘Mr. Penwyn was over two hundred miles away at the time.’

‘Oh, you know all about him. You occupy a post of confidence here, I see. Pleasant for you. Shall I tell you something more about him? Shall I tell you that he has family plate worth thousands

—solid old plate that has been in the family for more than a century ; that his wife makes no more account of her diamonds than if they were dog-roses she pulled out of the hedges to stick in her hair ? That's what I call good luck, for they were both of 'em as poor as Job until that cousin was murdered. Hard for a chap like me to stand outside their gates and hear about their riches, and pass on, with empty stomach and blistered feet—pass on to wheedle a few pence out of a peasant wench, or steal a barn-door fowl. There's destiny for you ! ”

He emptied the beer jug, which had held a quart of good home-brewed, took out his pipe and began to smoke, his mother watching him uneasily all the time. Those two were alone in the lodge. The moonlight and balmy air had lured Elspeth far afield, wandering over the dewy moorland, singing her snatches of gipsy song, and happy in her own wild way—happy though she knew she would get a scolding with her supper by and by.

‘They’ve got a party to-night, haven’t they ?’ asked Paul. ‘Half a dozen fine carriages passed

me an hour or so ago, before I struck out of the road into the footpath.’

‘Yes, there’s a dinner party.’

The gipsy rose and went to the open window. The lighted windows of the Manor House shone across the shadowy depth of park and shrubberies. Those dark eyes of his glittered curiously as he surveyed the scene.

‘I should like to see them feasting and enjoying themselves,’ he said, moving towards the door.

‘You mustn’t go near the house, you mustn’t be seen about the place,’ cried Rebecca, following him hurriedly.

‘Mustn’t I?’ sneered the gipsy. ‘I never learnt the meaning of the word mustn’t. I’ll go and have a peep at your fine ladies and gentlemen—I’m not quite a fool, and I shan’t let them see me—and then come back here for a night’s rest. You needn’t be frightened if I’m rather long. It’ll amuse me to look on at the high jinks through some half-open window. There, don’t look so anxious. I know how to keep myself dark.’



### CHAPTER XIII.

‘NOW HALF TO THE SETTING MOON HAVE GONE,  
AND HALF TO THE RISING DAY.

THE dinner party is over, the county families have retired to their several abodes. They are dispersed, like the soft summer mist which has melted from the moorland with the broadening light of the harvest moon.

Madge, Viola, and Lady Cheshunt are assembled in Mrs. Penwyn's dressing-room, a long, low room, with a wide and deep bow-window at one end, and three other old-fashioned windows, with broad cushioned seats therein—a room made for lounging and pleasant idleness, and half-hours with the best authors. Every variety of the genus easy chair is there, chintz-covered, and blossoming with all the flowers of the garden, as they only bloom upon chintz, large, gorgeous, and unaffected by aphides or

blight of any kind. There are tables here and there—gipsy tables, loaded with new books and other trumpery. There is a large Duchesse dressing table in one of the windows, and an antique ebony wardrobe, with richly carved doors, in a convenient recess; but baths, and all the paraphernalia of the toilet, are in a small chamber adjoining; this large apartment being rather a morning-room, or boudoir, than dressing-room proper.

There are water-colour landscapes and little bits of *genre* on the walls, by famous modern masters; a portrait of Churchill Penwyn, in crayon, hangs over the velvet-covered mantel-board; there are dwarf bookcases containing Madge's own particular library, the poets, old and new, Scott, Bulwer, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle; altogether the room has just those homely lovable characteristics which make rooms dear to their owners.

To-night the windows are all open to the soft summer air. The day has been oppressively warm, and the breath of night brings welcome refreshment to jaded humanity. Madge sits before her dressing-table, slowly unclasping her jewels as she talks. Her

maid has been dismissed, Mrs. Penwyn being in no wise dependent on her Abigail's help ; and the jewel-case, with its dark velvet lining, stands open on the wide marble slab. Lady Cheshunt lies back in the deepest and softest of the easy chairs, fanning herself with a big black and gold fan, a large and splendid figure in amber satin and hereditary rose-point lace, which one of the queens of Spain had presented to the dowager's mother when her husband was ambassador at Madrid. She looks like a picture by Rubens, large and fair, and full of colour.

‘ Well, my love, all dinner parties are more or less heavy, but upon the whole your county people were better than I expected,’ remarked the dowager, with her authoritative air. ‘ I have seen duller parties in the home counties. Your people seemed to enjoy themselves, and that is a point gained, however dull their talk of the births, marriages, and deaths of their belongings might be to *nous autres*. They have a placid belief that their conversation is entertaining which is really the next best thing to being really amusing. In a word, my dear Madge, I was not nearly so much bored as I expected to be.—Those

diamonds are positively lovely, child ; where did you get them ? ’

Madge had just taken her necklace—a string of large single stones—from her neck, and was laying it in its velvet nest.

‘They are heirlooms ; some of them, at least,’ she answered, ‘and came to Churchill with the estate. They had been locked up in an old tin cash-box at the county bank for a quarter of a century, I believe, and nobody seemed to know anything about them. They were described in the old Squire’s will as “sundry jewels in a tin box at the bank.” Churchill had the stones reset, and bought a good many more to complete the set.’

‘Well, my dear, they are worthy of a duchess. I hope you are careful of them.’

‘I don’t think it is in Madge’s nature to be careful of anything now she is rich,’ said Viola. ‘She was thoughtful and saving enough when we lived with poor papa, and when it was such a hard struggle to keep out of debt. But now she has plenty of money she scatters it right and left, and is perpetually enjoying the luxury of giving.’



‘But I am not careless about my diamonds, Viola. Mills will come presently, and carry off this box to the iron safe in the plate-room.’

‘I never believed much in plate-rooms,’ said Lady Cheshunt. ‘A plate-room with its iron door is a kind of invitation to burglars. It tells them where the riches of the house are concentrated. When I am in other people’s houses I generally keep my jewel-case on my dressing-table, but I take care to have it labelled “Gloves,” and that it looks as little like a jewel-case as possible. I wouldn’t trust it in anybody’s plate-room. There, child, you are yawning, I see, in spite of your efforts to conceal the operation.—Come, Viola, your sister is tired after the mental strain she has undergone, in pretending to be interested in all those people’s innumerable relations.’

The ladies kissed and parted with much affection, and Madge was left alone, to sit by her dressing-table in a dreamy attitude, forgetful of the lateness of the hour.

It was a sad thought which kept her musing there while the night deepened, and the harvest moon

sank lower in the placid sky. She thought that all was not well with the husband of her love. She could not forget that look and gesture of his when she had questioned him about his faith as a Christian—nothing fearing his answer to that solemn inquiry when she asked it. That darkening brow, those gloomy eyes turned upon her for a moment in anger or in pain, had haunted her ever since. Not a Christian! Her beloved, her idol, the dearer half of soul, and heart, and mind. Death assumed new terrors in the thought that in worlds beyond they two must be parted.

‘Rather let us endure a mutual purgation,’ she thought, with a wish that was half a prayer. ‘Let me bear half the burden of his sins.’

He had gone to church with her, he had assisted in the service with grave attention—nay, sometimes even with a touch of fervour, but he had never taken the sacrament. That had troubled her not a little; but when she had ventured to speak to him upon the subject, he had replied with the common argument, ‘I do not feel my faith strong enough to share in so exalted a mystery.’

She had been content to accept this reason, believing that time would strengthen his faith in holy things. But now he had told her in hardest, plainest words, that he had no right to the name of Christian.

She sat brooding upon this bitter thought for some time, then rose, changed her dinner dress for a loose white muslin dressing-gown, and went into her bedroom, which opened out of the dressing-room. She had not once thought of those earthly jewels in the open box on the table, or even wondered why Mills had not come to fetch them. The truth being that—distracted by the abnormal gaiety which prevailed below stairs, where the servants regaled themselves with a festive supper after the patrician banquet—Miss Mills had forgotten her duties so far as to become, for the time being, unconscious of the existence of Mrs. Penwyn's diamonds. At this moment she was sleeping comfortably in her chamber in the upper storey, and the diamonds were left to their fate.

Lady Cheshunt was accustomed to late hours, and considered midnight the most agreeable part of her day, so on leaving Madge's dressing-room she took

Viola to her own apartment at the other end of the corridor, for another half-hour or so of friendly chat, to which Viola, who was an inveterate gossip, had not the slightest objection. They talked over everybody's dress and appearance, the discussion generally ending in a verdict of ‘guy,’ or ‘fright.’ They talked over Churchill, Viola praising him enthusiastically, Lady Cheshunt good-naturedly allowing that she had been mistaken in him.

‘He used to remind me of Mephistopheles, my dear,’ said the vivacious matron. ‘I don't mean that he had a hooked nose or diagonal eyebrows, or a cock's feather in his hat; but he had a look of repressed power that almost frightened me. I fancied he was a man who could do anything—whether great or wicked—by the sovereign force of his intellect and will: but that was before his cousin died. Wealth has improved him wonderfully.’

At last a clock in the corridor struck one. Viola gave a little scream of surprise, kissed her dear Lady Cheshunt for the twentieth time that night, and tripped away. She had gone half way down the corridor when she stopped, startled by a sight that



moved her to scream louder than she had done just now at the striking of the clock, had not some instinctive feeling of caution checked her.

A man—a man of the vagabond or burglar species—that very man who a few hours earlier had presented himself to Rebecca at the lodge—was in the act of leaving Mrs. Penwyn's dressing-room. His back was turned to Viola, he looked neither to the right nor the left, but crept along the corridor with stealthy yet rapid footsteps. Viola paused not a moment ere she pursued him. Her footfall hardly sounded on the carpeted floor, but the flutter of her dress startled the intruder. He looked at her, and then dashed onward to the head of the staircase, almost throwing himself down the shallow oak stairs, the flying figure in its airy white robe closely pursuing him.

At the head of the stairs Viola gave the alarm, with a cry which rang through the silent house. She was gaining upon the thief. At the bottom of the stairs she had him in her grasp, the two small hands clutching his greasy velveteen collar.

He turned upon her with a fierce oath, would

have struck her to the ground, perhaps, and marred her delicate beauty for ever with one blow of his iron fist, had not the billiard-room door opened suddenly and Mr. Penwyn appeared, Sir Lewis Dallas, a visitor staying in the house, at his elbow.

‘What is the matter? Who is this man?’ cried Churchill, while he and Sir Lewis hastened to Viola’s side, and drew her away from the ruffian.

‘A thief, a burglar!’ gasped the excited girl. ‘I saw him coming out of my sister’s dressing-room. He has murdered her, perhaps. Oh, do go and see if she is safe, Churchill!’

‘Hold him, Lewis,’ cried Churchill, and ran upstairs without another word.

Sir Lewis was tall and muscular, an athlete by nature and art. In his grip the marauder waited submissively enough till Churchill returned, breathless but relieved in his mind. Madge was safe—Madge did not even know that there was anything amiss.

‘Thanks, Lewis,’ he said, quietly, taking the

intruder from his friend's hand as coolly as if he had been some piece of lumber.

'Go upstairs to your room, Vio, and sleep soundly for the rest of the night,' added Churchill to his sister-in-law. 'I'll compliment you on your prowess to-morrow morning.'

'I don't think I could go to bed,' said Viola, shuddering. 'There may be more burglars about the house. I feel as if it was swarming with them, like the beetles Mills talks about in the kitchen.'

'Nonsense, child! The fellow has no companions. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to see my sister as far as the end of the corridor, Lewis?'

'Oh no,' cried Viola, quickly. 'Indeed, I'm not frightened. I don't want any escort;' and she ran upstairs so fast that Sir Lewis lost his opportunity of saying something sweet at the end of the corridor. His devotion to the pretty Miss Bellingham was notorious, and Viola apprehended some soft speech, perhaps a gentle pressure of her hand, a fervid assurance that no peril should come near her while

he watched beneath that roof. And the portionless daughter of Sir Nugent Bellingham was not wise enough in her generation to encourage this wealthy young baronet.

'Now, you sir, go in there!' said Churchill, pushing the gipsy into his study. 'You needn't wait, Lewis. I can tackle this fellow single-handed.'

'No! I can't let you do that. He may have a knife about him.'

'If he has I don't think he'll try it upon me. I brought this from my dressing-room just now.'

He pointed to the butt-end of a revolver lurking in the breast-pocket of his smoking coat.

'Well, I'll smoke a cigar in the billiard-room while you hold your parley with him. I shall be within call.'

Sir Lewis retired to enjoy his cigar, and Churchill went into his study. He found that the burglar had availed himself of this momentary delay, and was beginning to unfasten the shutters.

'What? You'd like to get out that way,' said the Squire. 'Not till you and I have had our talk



together. Let go that shutter, if you please, while I light the lamp.'

He struck a wax match and lighted a shaded reading lamp that stood on the table.

'Now,' he said, calmly, 'be good enough to sit down in that chair while I overhaul your pockets.'

'There's nothing in my pockets,' growled Paul, prepared for his resistance.

'Isn't there? Then you can't object to have them emptied. You'd better not be needlessly objective. I've an argument here that you'll hardly resist,' showing the pistol, 'and my friend who grappled you just now is ready to stand by me.'

The man made no further resistance. Churchill turned out the greasy linings of his pockets, but produced nothing except loose shreds of tobacco and various scraps of rubbish. He felt inside the vagabond's loose shirt, thinking that he might have hidden his booty in his bosom, but with no result. A cunning smile curled the corners of the scoundrel's lips, a smile that told Churchill to persist in his search.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘you’ve some of my wife’s diamonds about you. I saw the case open, and half empty. You were not in that room for nothing. You shall strip to your skin, my man. But first, off with that neckerchief of yours.’

The man looked at him vengefully, eyed the pistol in his captor’s hand, weighed the forces against him, and then slowly and sullenly untied the rusty black silk handkerchief which encircled his brawny throat, and threw it on the table. Something inside the handkerchief struck sharply on the wood.

‘I thought as much,’ said Churchill.

He untwisted the greasy wisp of silk, whereupon his wife’s collet necklace and the large single stones she wore in her ears fell upon the table. Churchill put the gems into his pocket without a word.

‘Is that all?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ the man answered, with an oath.

Churchill looked at him keenly. ‘You will go straight from here to jail,’ he said, ‘so concealment wouldn’t serve you much. You are a gipsy, I think?’

‘I am.’

‘What brought you here to-night?’

‘I came to see a relation.’

‘Here, on these premises?’

‘At the lodge. The woman you’ve chosen for your lodge-keeper is my mother.’

‘Rebecca Mason?’

‘Yes.’

‘Churchill took a turn or two up and down the room thoughtfully.

‘Since you’ve been so uncommonly kind to her, perhaps you’ll strain a point in my favour,’ said the gipsy. ‘I shouldn’t have tried to rob you if I hadn’t been driven to it by starvation. It goes hard with a man when he has a wolf gnawing his vitals, and stands outside an open window and sees a lot of women with thousands of pounds on their neck, in the shape of blessed gems that do no more real good to any one than the beads our women bedizen themselves with. And then he sees the old ivy roots are thick enough to serve for a ladder, and the windows upstairs left open and handy for him to walk inside. That’s what I call

temptation. Perhaps *you* were outside the good things of this world at some time of your life, and can feel for a poor wretch like me.’

‘I have known poverty,’ answered Churchill, wondrously forbearing towards this vagrant, ‘and endured it.’

‘Yes, but you hadn’t to endure it for ever. Fortune was kind to you. It isn’t often a man drops into such a berth as this by a fluke. You’ve got your property, and you may as well let me off easily, for my mother’s sake.’

‘You don’t suppose your mother is more to me than any other servant in my employ,’ said Churchill, turning upon him sharply.

‘Yes, I do. You wouldn’t go to the gipsy tents for a servant unless you had your reasons. What should have brought you to Eborsham to hunt for a lodge-keeper?’

The mention of that fatal city startled Churchill. Seldom was that name uttered in his hearing. It was among things tabooed.

‘I’m sorry I can’t oblige you by condoning a felony,’ he said, in his most tranquil manner. ‘As



a justice of the peace any sentimentality on my part would be somewhat out of character. The utmost I can do for you is to get the case heard without delay. You may anticipate the privilege of being committed for trial, to-morrow at noon, at the petty sessions.'

He left the room without another word, and locked the door on his prisoner. The lock was good and in excellent order, the door one of those ponderous portals only to be found in old manor houses and their like.

But Mr. Penwyn seemed to have forgotten the window, which was only guarded on the inside. He had shut one side of a trap, ignoring the possibility of escape on the other.

He looked into the billiard-room before he went up stairs. Sir Lewis Dallas had finished his cigar and was slumbering peacefully, stretched at full length on one of the divans, like an uninterested member of the House of Commons.

'He's nearly as well off there as in his room, so I won't interrupt his dreams,' thought Churchill, as he retired.

That shriek of Viola's had awakened several of the household. Mills had heard it, and had descended half dressed to the corridor, in time to meet Miss Bellingham on her way upstairs, and to hear the history of the gipsy's attempt from that young lady. Mills had taken the news back to the drowsy housemaids—had further communicated it to the startled footman, who looked out of his half-opened door to ask what was the row. Thus by the time the household began to be astir again, between five and six next morning, everybody knew more or less about the attempted robbery.

‘What have they done with the robber?’ asked the maids and the odd man and boot-cleaner, who alone among the masculine retainers condescended to rise at this early hour.

‘I think he must be shut up in master's study,’ answered one of the women, whose duty it was to open the house, ‘for the door's locked and I couldn't get in.’

‘Did you hear anybody inside?’ asked the cook, with keen interest.

‘Not a sound. He must be asleep, I suppose.’

‘The hardened villain. To think that he can sleep with such a conscience as his, and the likelihood of being sent to Botany Bay in a week or two.’

‘Botany Bay has been done away with,’ said the odd man, who read the newspapers. ‘They’ll send him no further than Dartmoor.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

‘ O HEAVEN ! THAT ONE MIGHT READ THE BOOK  
OF FATE ! ’

CHURCHILL PENWYN looked something the worse for that half-hour's excitement overnight when the Manor House party assembled at breakfast, between eight and nine next morning. The days began early at Penwyn, and only Lady Cheshunt was guilty of that social malingering involved in a chronic headache, which prevented her appearing on the dewy side of noon. Perhaps Mr. Penwyn's duties as host during the previous evening might have fatigued him a little. He had a weary look in that bright morning sunshine—a look of unrest, as of one who had slept but little in the night hours. Madge glanced at him every now and then with half-concealed anxiety. Every change, were it ever so slight, in that one beloved face was visible to her.



‘I hope last night’s business has not worried you, love,’ she said tenderly, making some excuse for carrying him his breakfast-cup with her own hands. ‘The diamonds are safe, and no doubt the man will be properly punished for his audacity.’

Churchill had told her all about the attempted robbery, in his clear, passionless way, but not a word of that interview in the study, between gentleman and vagabond. Madge, merciful to all innocent sufferers, had no sentimental compassion for this frustrated burglar, but desired that he should be duly punished for his crime.

‘I am not particularly worried, dear. It was rather an unpleasant ending to a pleasant evening, that is all.’

They were still seated at the breakfast-table, and Sir Lewis Dallas was still listening with rapt attention to Viola’s account of her feelings at the sight of the thief, when the butler, who had left the room a few minutes before, in compliance with a whispered request from his subordinate, re-entered, solemn of aspect, and full of that self-importance common to the craft.

‘The man has been taken again, sir, and is in the village lock-up,’ he announced to his master.

Churchill rose hastily.

‘Taken again! What do you mean? I left him locked up in my study at two o’clock this morning.’

‘Yes, sir, but he unfastened the shutters and got out of the window, and would have got clean off, I dare say, if Tyrrel, the gamekeeper, and his son hadn’t been about with a couple of dogs, on the look-out for poachers. The dogs smelt him out just as he was getting over the fence in the pine wood, and the Tyrrels collared him, and took him off to the lock-up then and there. He fought hard, Tyrrel says, and would have been almost a match for the two of ’em if it hadn’t been for the dogs. They turned the scale,’ concluded the butler, grandly.

‘Imagine the fellow so nearly getting off!’ exclaimed Sir Lewis. ‘I wonder it didn’t strike you that he would get out at the window, Penwyn. You locked the door, and thought you had him safe. Something like the painter fellow, who went in for

the feline species, and cut two holes in his studio door, a big one for his cat, and a little one for her kitten, forgetting that the little cat could have got through the big cat's door. That's the way with you clever men, you're seldom up to trap in trifles.'

'Rather stupid of me, I confess,' said Churchill, 'but I suppose I was a little obfuscated by the whole business. One hasn't a burglar on one's hands every night in the week. However,' he added, slowly, 'he's safe in the lock-up; that's the grand point, and I shall have the pleasure of assisting at his official examination at twelve o'clock.'

'Are the petty sessions on to-day?' asked Sir Lewis, warmly interested. 'How jolly!'

'You don't mean to say that you take any interest in that sort of twaddle?' said Churchill.

'Anything in the way of crime is interesting to me,' replied the young man; 'and to assist at the examination of the ruffian who frightened Miss Bellingham will be rapture. I only regret that the old hanging laws are repealed.'

'I don't feel quite so unmerciful as that,' said Madge, 'but I should like the man to be punished,

if it were only as an example. It isn’t nice to lose the sense of security in one’s own house, to be afraid to open one’s window after dark, and to feel that there may be a burglar lurking in every corner.’

‘ And to know that your burglar is your undeveloped assassin,’ added Sir Lewis. ‘ I’ve no doubt that scoundrel would have tried to murder us both last night if it hadn’t been for my biceps and Churchill’s revolver.’

The breakfast party slowly dispersed, some to the grounds, some to the billiard-room. Every one had letters to write, or some duty to perform, but no one felt in the cue for performance. Nor could anybody talk of anything except the burglar, Viola’s courage, Churchill’s coolness in the hour of peril, and carelessness in the matter of the shutters. Lady Cheshunt required to have bulletins carried to her periodically, while she sipped orange Pekoe in the luxurious retirement of an Arabian bed.

Thus the morning wore on till half-past eleven, at which time the carriage was ordered to convey Mrs. Penwyn, Miss Bellingham, and Sir Lewis Dallas to the village inn, attached whereto was



the justices' room, where Mr. Penwyn and his brother magistrate, or magistrates, were to meet in solemn assembly.

Viola and Sir Lewis were wanted as witnesses. Mrs. Penwyn went, ostensibly to take care of her sister, but really because she was acutely anxious to see the result of the morning's work. That look of secret care in her husband's face had disturbed her. Looks which for the world at large meant nothing had their language for her. She had studied every line of that face, knew its lights and shadows by heart.

The day was lovely, another perfect August day. The shining faces of the reapers turned towards them as they drove past the golden fields, broad peasant faces, sun-browned, and dewy with labour's honourable sweat. All earth was gay and glad. Madge Penwyn looked at this fair world sadly, heavy with a vague sense of secret care. The skylark sang his thrilling joy-notes high up in the blue vault that arched these golden lands, and the note of rapture jarred upon the wife's ear.

'I'm afraid we have been too happy, Churchill

and I,’ she thought, and then recalled two lines of Hood’s, full of deepest pathos,—

‘ For there is e’en a happiness  
That makes the heart afraid.’

They had been utterly happy only a little while ago, but since that confession of Churchill’s, the wife’s heart had been burdened with a secret grief. And to-day she felt that hidden care keenly. Something in her husband’s manner had suggested concealed anxieties, fears, cares which he could not or would not share with her. ‘ If he did but know how loyal I could be to him,’ she thought, ‘ he would hardly shrink from trusting me.’

Viola was full of excitement, and quite ferociously disposed towards the burglar.

‘ I suppose to-day’s business is only a kind of rehearsal,’ she said, gaily, ‘ and that we shall have to give our evidence again at Bodmin assizes. And some pert young barrister on the Western Circuit will browbeat me and try to make me contradict myself, and make fun of me, and ask if I had put my hair in papers, or had unplaited my chignon when I ran downstairs after the burglar.’

‘I should like to see him do it,’ muttered Sir Lewis, in a vengeful tone.

They were in Penwyn village by this time, the old-fashioned straggling village, two rows of cottages scattered apart on the wide high road, a tiny Methodist chapel in a field, the pound, the lock-up, big enough for one culprit, and the village inn, attached to which there was the justice-room, a long narrow upper chamber, with a low ceiling.

All the inhabitants of Penwyn had turned out to see the great folks. It was like an Irish crowd, children, old women, and young matrons with infants in their arms. The children had just turned out from the pretty Gothic school-house, which Mr. Penwyn had built for them. They bobbed deferentially as their patroness descended from her carriage, and a murmur of praise and love ran through the little crowd—sweetest chorus to a woman’s ear.

‘We ought to be happy in this fair land,’ thought Madge, as her heart thrilled at the sight of her people. ‘It is like ingratitude to God to keep one secret care when He has blessed us so richly.’

## CHAPTER XV.

‘QUI PEUT SOUS LE SOLEIL TROMPER SA DESTINEE?’

CHURCHILL was waiting at the inn door to receive his wife. He had ridden across on his favourite horse Tarpan—a long-necked, raking bay, over sixteen hands, and a great jumper—a horse with a tremendous stride, just such a brute as Lenore’s lover might have bestridden in that awful night-ride.

‘Is the man here, Churchill?’ Madge asked, anxiously.

‘Yes, love. There is nothing to be uneasy about,’ answered her husband, replying to her looks rather than to her words.

‘Yet you seem anxious, Churchill.’

‘Only in my magisterial capacity. Tresillian is here. We shall commit this fellow in no time. It



will only need a few words from Viola and Sir Lewis.'

Not a syllable about the diamond necklace had Mr. Penwyn said to his wife. He had replaced the gems in her dressing-case while she slept peacefully in the adjoining room, and no one but himself and the burglar knew how far the attempted robbery had gone.

They all went up the narrow little staircase, Mr. Penwyn leading his wife up the steep stairs, Viola and Sir Lewis following. The justice-room was full of people—or at least that end of it devoted to the public. The other end of it was fenced off, and here at a table sat Mr. Tresillian, J. P., and his clerk—ready for action.

'Look, Churchill,' whispered Madge, as her husband put her hand through his arm and led her towards this end of the room, 'there is the woman at the lodge. What can have brought her here?'

Mr. Penwyn's glance followed his wife's for a moment. Yes, there stood Rebecca, of the North Lodge, sullen, even threatening of aspect, or seeming so to the eye that looked at her now. What a

horrible likeness she bore to that ruffian he had dealt with last night!

Mr. Tresillian shook hands with the two ladies. He was a tall, stout man, with a florid countenance, who rode to hounds all the season, and devoted himself to the pleasures of the table for the rest of the year. It was something awful to the crowd to see him shake hands, and smile, and talk about the weather, just like a common mortal; to see him pretend to be so good-natured too, when it was his function—the very rule of his being—to inflict summary punishment upon his fellow-men, to have no compassion for pleasant social vices, and to be as hard on a drunkard as upon a thief.

There was only one case to be heard this morning, and the thrilling interest of that one case held the spectators breathless. Women stood on tiptoe peering over the shoulders of the men—women who ought to have been at their washtubs, or baking homely satisfying pasties for the family supper.

The ruffian was brought in closely guarded by a couple of rural policemen, and looking consider-

ably the worse for last night's recapture. He had fought like a wild cat for his freedom, had given and taken a couple of black eyes, had furthermore received a formidable cut across his forehead, and had had his clothes torn in the scuffle.

The two Tyrrels, father and son, also in a damaged condition, were there to relate proudly how they had pounced upon the offender just as he was clambering over a fence. They had told their story already so many times, in an informal manner, to curious friends and acquaintances, that they were prepared to give it with effect presently when they should be put upon oath.

Mr. Tresillian, who went to work in a very slow and ponderous way, was still conferring with his clerk in a bass undertone, which sounded like distant organ music, when Rebecca Mason pushed her way through the crowd, and came to that privileged portion of the room where Mr. Penwyn and his wife were sitting.

'I want to know if you're going to press this charge, Mr. Penwyn,' she asked, quietly enough, but hardily.

‘Of course he is,’ answered Madge, with a flash of anger. ‘Do you suppose we are going to overlook such an attempt—a man breaking into our house after midnight, and frightening my sister nearly out of her wits? We should never feel secure at the Manor if this man were not made an example of. Pray what interest have you in pleading for him?’

‘I’ll tell you that by and by, ma’am. I did not ask the question of you, but of my master.’

‘Your master and I have but one thought in the matter.’

‘Do you mean to prosecute that man, Mr. Penwyn,’ asked Rebecca, looking steadfastly at the Squire. Even while addressing Madge she had kept her eyes on Churchill’s face. The brief dialogue had been carried on in an undertone, while Mr. Tresillian and the clerk were still muttering to each other.

‘The case is out of my hands. I have no power to prevent the man’s committal.’

‘Yes, you have,’ answered Rebecca, doggedly. ‘You have power to do anything here. What is law



or justice against a great landowner, in a place like this? You are lord and master here.'

'Why do you bother me about this burglar?'

'He is my son.'

'I am sorry any servant of mine should be related to such a scoundrel.'

'I am not proud of the relationship,' answered the lodge-keeper, coolly. 'Yet there are men capable of worse crimes than entering another man's house—criminals who wear smooth faces and fine broad-cloth—and stand high in the world. I'd rather have that vagabond for my son than some of them.'

Churchill glanced at his wife, as if to consult her feelings. But Madge, so tender and pitying to the destitute and afflicted, had an inflexible look just now. Rebecca was her particular antipathy, a blot upon the fair face of Penwyn manor, which she was most anxious to see removed; and now this Rebecca appeared in a new and still more disagreeable light as the mother of a burglar. It was hardly strange, therefore, that Mrs. Penwyn should be indisposed to see the law outraged in the cause of mercy.'

‘I regret that my wish to serve you will not allow me to condone a felony on behalf of your son,’ said Churchill, with slow distinctness, and meeting that piercing gaze of the gipsy’s with as steady a look in his own grey eyes. ‘The attempt was too daring to be overlooked. A man breaks into my house at midnight, naturally with some evil intent.’

Still not a word about the diamonds which he had recovered from the burglar’s person.

‘He did not break into your house,’ argued Rebecca, ‘you left your windows open, and he walked in. He had been drinking, I know, and hardly knew where he was going, or what he was doing. If he had had his wits about him, he wouldn’t have allowed himself to be caught by a girl,’ she added, contemptuously.

‘He may have been drunk,’ said Churchill, with a thoughtful look, ‘but that hardly mends the matter. It isn’t pleasant to have a drunken vagabond prowling about one’s house. What do you say, my queen?’ he asked, turning to Madge, with a smile, but not quite the smile which was wont to brighten his face when he looked at her. ‘Will you exercise your

prerogative of mercy? Shall I try what I can do to get this vagabond off with a few days in Penwyn lock-up, instead of having him committed for trial?’

‘I have no compassion for a man who lifted his hand against my sister,’ answered Madge, warmly. ‘Sir Lewis told me all about it, Churchill. He saw that villain raise his clenched fist to strike Viola’s face. He would have disfigured her for life, or killed her perhaps, if Sir Lewis had not caught his arm. So you suppose I am going to plead for such a scoundrel as that?’

‘Come, Mrs. Penwyn, you are a woman and a mother,’ pleaded Rebecca, ‘you ought to be merciful.’

‘Not at the expense of society. Justice and order would, indeed, be outraged if the law were stretched in favour of such a ruffian as your son.’

‘You’re hard, lady,’ said the gipsy, ‘but I think I can say a word that will soften you. Let me speak to you in the next room,’ looking towards a half-open door that communicated with a small parlour adjoining. ‘Let me speak with you alone

for five minutes—you’d better not say no, for his sake,’ she urged, with a glance at Churchill.

Mr. Penwyn rose suddenly with darkening brow, and seized Madge by the arm, as if he would hold her away from the woman.

‘I will not suffer any communication between you and my wife,’ he exclaimed. ‘You have said your say and have been answered. I will do anything I can for you, grant anything you choose to ask for yourself,’ with emphasis, ‘but your son must take his chance.—Tresillian, we are ready.’

‘Lady, you’d better hear me,’ pleaded the gipsy.

That plea weighed lightly enough with Madge Penwyn. She was watching her husband’s face, and it was a look in that which alone influenced her decision.

‘I will hear you,’ she said to the gipsy. ‘Ask Mr. Tresillian to wait for a few minutes, Churchill.’

‘Madge, what are you thinking of?’ cried her husband. ‘She can have nothing to say that has not been said already. She has had her answer.’

‘I will hear her, Churchill, and alone.’



That 'I will' was accompanied by an imperious look not often seen in Madge Penwyn's face—never before seen by him she looked at now.

'As you will, love,' he answered, very quietly, and made way for her to pass into the adjoining room.

Rebecca followed, and shut the door between the two rooms. There was a faint stir, and then the low hum of the little crowd sank into silence. Every eye turned to that closed door; every mind was curious to know what those two women were saying on the other side of it.

There was a pause of about ten minutes. Churchill sat by the official table, silent and thoughtful. Mr. Tresillian fidgeted with the stationery, and yawned once or twice. The ruffian stood in his place, dogged and imperturbable, looking as if he were the individual least concerned in the day's proceedings.

At last the door opened, and Madge appeared. She came slowly into the room,—slowly, and like a person who only walked steadily by an effort. So white and wan was the face turned appealingly towards Churchill, that she looked like one newly

risen from some sickness unto death. Churchill rose to go to her, but hesitatingly, as if he were doubtful whether to approach her—almost as if they had been strangers.

‘Churchill,’ she said faintly, looking at him with pathetic eyes—a gaze in which deepest love and despair were mingled. At that look and word he went to her, put his arm round her, and led her gently back to her seat.

‘You must get this man off, Churchill,’ she whispered faintly. ‘You must.’

He bent his head, but spoke not a word, only pressed her hand with a grip strong as pain or death. And then he went to Mr. Tresillian, who was growing tired of the whole business, and was at all times plastic as wax in the hands of his brother magistrate, not being troubled with ideas of his own in a general way. Indeed, he had expended so much brain-power in the endeavour to out-manceuvre the manifold artifices of certain veteran dog foxes in the district, that he could hardly be supposed to have much intellectual force left for the Bench.

‘I find there has been a good deal of muddle in

this business,' said Churchill to him confidentially. 'The man is the son of my lodgekeeper, and a decent hard-working fellow enough, it seems. He had been drinking, and strayed into the Manor House in an obfuscated condition last night—my servants are most to blame for leaving doors open—and Viola saw him, and was frightened, and made a good deal of unnecessary fuss. And then my keepers knocked the fellow about more than they need have done. So I really think if you were to let him off with a day or two in the lock-up, or even a severe reprimand——'

'Yes—yes—yes—yes—yes,' said Mr. Tresillian, keeping up a running fire of muttered affirmatives throughout Churchill's speech. 'Certainly. Let the fellow off, by all means, if he had no felonious intention, and Mrs. Penwyn wishes it. Ladies are so compassionate. Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

Mr. Tresillian was thinking rather more about a certain fifteen-acre wheat-field now ready for the sickle than of the business in hand. Reapers were scarce in the land just now, and he was not clear in his mind about getting in that corn.

So, instead of swearing in witnesses and holding a ceremonious examination, Mr. Tresillian disappointed the assembled audience by merely addressing a few sharpish words to the delinquent, and sending him about his business, with a warning never more to create trouble in that particular neighbourhood, lest it should be worse for him. The offender was further enjoined to be grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Penwyn for their kindness in not pressing the charge. And thus the business was over, and the court rose. The crowd dispersed slowly, grumbling not a little about Justice's justice, and deeply disappointed at not having seen the strange offender committed for trial.

‘If it had been one of us,’ a man remarked to a neighbour, ‘we shouldn't have got off so easy.’

‘No,’ growled another. ‘If it had been some poor devil had up for licking his wife, he'd have got it hot.’

All was over. Viola and Sir Lewis Dallas, who had been indulging in a little quiet flirtation by an open window, and not attending to the progress of events, were beyond measure surprised at the



abrupt close of the proceedings, and not a little disappointed, for Viola had quite looked forward to appearing in the witness-box at Bodmin Assize Court, and being cross-examined by an impertinent barrister, and then complimented upon her heroism by the judge, and perhaps cheered by the multitude. Nothing could be flatter than this ending.

‘It’s just like Madge,’ exclaimed Viola. ‘She may make believe to be angry for half an hour or so, but that soft heart of hers is melted at the first piteous appeal. That horrid woman at the lodge has begged off her horrid son.’

Madge, whiter than summer lilies, did not look in a condition to be questioned just now.

‘See how ill she looks,’ said Viola to Sir Lewis. ‘They have worried her into a nervous state with their goings on. Let us get her away.’

There was no need for Sir Lewis’s intervention. Churchill led his wife out of the room. Erect, and facing the crowd firmly enough both of them, but one pale as death.

‘Are you going to ride home, Churchill?’ asked

Madge, as her husband handed her into the carriage.

‘Yes, love, I may as well go back as I came on Tarpan.’

‘I had rather you came with us,’ she said, with an appealing look.

‘As you like, dear. Lewis, will you ride Tarpan?’

Sir Lewis looked at Viola and then at his boots. It was an honour to ride Tarpan, but hardly a pleasant thing to ride him without straps; and then Sir Lewis would have liked that homeward drive, with Viola for his *vis-à-vis*.

‘By all means, if Mrs. Penwyn would rather you went back in the carriage,’ he said good-naturedly, but with a look at Viola which meant ‘*You know what a sacrifice I am making.*’

That drive home was a very silent one. Viola was suffering from reaction after excitement, and leaned back with a listless air. Madge looked straight before her, with grave fixed eyes, gazing into space. And still there was not a cloud in the blue bright sky, and the reapers standing amongst

the tawny corn turned their swart faces towards the Squire's carriage, and pulled their moistened forelocks, and thought what a fine thing it was for the gentry to be driving swiftly through the clear warm air, lolling back upon soft cushions, and with no more exertion than was involved in holding a silk umbrella.

‘But how white Madam Penwyn looks!’ said one of the men, a native of the place, to his mate. ‘She doant look as if the good things of this life agreed with her. She looks paler and more tired like than you nor me.’

## CHAPTER XVI.

‘THIS IS MORE STRANGE THAN SUCH A MURDER IS.’

THEY were in Madge’s dressing-room, that spacious, many-windowed chamber, with its closed venetians, which was cool and shadowy even on a blazing August day like this. They were alone together, husband and wife, face to face, two white faces turned towards each other, blanched by passions stronger and deeper than it is man’s common lot to suffer.

They had come here straight from the carriage that brought them back to the Manor House, and they were alone for the first moment since Madge had heard Rebecca Mason’s petition.

‘Churchill,’ she said slowly, with agonized eyes lifted to his face, ‘I know all—all that woman could tell; and she showed me——’

She stopped, shuddering, and clasped her hands



before her face. Her husband stood like a rock, and made no attempt to draw nearer to her. He stood aloof and waited.

‘I know all,’ she repeated, with a passionate sob, ‘and I remember what I said when you asked me to be your wife. You were too poor—we were too poor. I could not marry you because of your poverty. It was my worldliness, my mercenary decision that influenced you, that urged you to—— Oh, Churchill, half the fault was mine. God give me leave to bear half the burden of His anger.’

She flung herself upon her husband’s shoulder, and sobbed there, clinging to him more fondly than in their happiest hour, her arms clasping him round the neck, her face hidden upon his breast, with such love as only such a woman can feel—love which, supreme in itself, rises above every lesser influence.

‘What! you touch me, Madge! You come to my arms still; you shed compassionate tears upon my breast. Then I am not wholly lost. Vile as I am, there is comfort still. My love, my fond one, fortune gave me nothing so sweet as you.’

‘Oh, Churchill, why, why—?’ she sobbed.

He understood the question involved in that one broken word, hardly audible for the sobs that shook his wife’s frame.

‘Dearest, Fate was hard upon me, and I wanted you!’ he said, with a calmness that chilled her soul. ‘A good man would have trusted in Providence, no doubt, and waited unrepiningly for life’s blessings until he was grey and old, and went down to his grave without ever having known earthly bliss, taking with him some vague notion that he was to come into his estate somewhere else. I am not a good man. My passionate love and my scorn of poverty would not let me wait. I knew that, by one swift bold act—a wicked deed if you will, but not a cruel one, since every man must die once—I could win all I desired. Fortune had made two men’s lots flagitiously unequal. I balanced them.’

‘Oh, Churchill, it is awful to hear you speak like that. Surely you have repented—surely all your life must be poisoned with regret.’

‘Yes, I have felt the canker called remorse. I could surrender all good things that earth can give—

yes, let you go from these fond arms, beloved, if that which was done could be undone. And now you will loathe me, and we must part.'

'Part, Churchill! What, leave you because you are the most miserable of men? No, dearest, I will cling to you, and hold by you to the end of life, come what will. If it was I who tempted you to sin, you shall not bear your burden alone. Loathe you!' she cried, passionately, looking up at him with streaming eyes, 'no, Churchill! I cannot think of that hideous secret without horror; I cannot think of the sinner without pity. There is a love that is stronger than the world's favour, stronger than right, or peace, or honour, and such a love I have given you.'

'My angel—my comforter! Would to God I had kept my soul spotless for your sake!'

'And for our child, Churchill, for our darling. Oh, dearest, if there can be pardon for such a sin as yours—and Christ spoke words of mercy and promise to the thief on the cross—let us strive for it, strive with tears and prayers, and deepest penitence. Oh, my love, believe in a God of mercy, the God who

sent His Son to preach repentance to sinners. Love, let us kneel together to that offended God, let us sue for mercy, side by side.’

Her husband drew her closer to his breast, kissed the pale lips with unspeakable tenderness, looked into the true brave eyes which did not shrink from his gaze.

‘Even I, who have had you for my wife, did not know the divinity of a woman’s love—until this miserable hour. My dearest, even to comfort you, I cannot add deliberate blasphemy to my sins. I cannot kneel, or pray to a Power in which my faith is of the weakest. Keep your gentle creed, dearest, adore your God of mercy—but I have hardened my heart against these things too long to find comfort in them now. My one glory, my one consolation, is the thought that, lost as I am, I have not fallen too low for your love. You will love me and hold by me, knowing my sin ; and let my one merit be that in this dark hour I have not lied to you. I have not striven to outweigh that woman’s accusation by some fable which your love might accept.’

‘No, Churchill, you have trusted me, and you



shall find me worthy of your trust,' she answered, bravely. 'No act of mine shall ever betray you. And if you cannot pray—if God withholds the light of truth from you for a little while, my prayers shall ascend to Him like ever-burning incense. My intercession shall never cease. My faith shall never falter.'

He kissed her again without a word—too deeply moved for speech,—and then turned away from her and paced the room to and fro, while she went to her dressing-table, and looked wonderingly at the white wan face, which had beamed so brightly on her guests last night. She looked at herself thoughtfully, remembering that henceforward she had a part to act, and a fatal secret to keep. No wan looks, no tell-tale pallor must betray the horrid truth.

'Madge,' said her husband, presently, after two or three thoughtful turns up and down the room, 'I have not one word to say to you in self-justification. I stand before you confessed, a sinner of the blackest dye. Yet you must not imagine that my whole life is of a colour with that one hideous act. It is not so. Till that hour my life had been blameless enough—more blameless perhaps than the career of

one young man in twenty, in our modern civilization. Temptation to vulgar sins never assailed me. I was guiltless till that fatal hour in which my evil genius whispered the suggestion of a prize worth the price of crime. Macbeth was a brave and honourable soldier, you know, when the fatal sisters met him on the heath, and hissed their promise into his ear. And in that moment guilty hope seized upon his soul, and already in thought he was a murderer. Dearest, I have never been a profligate, or cheat, or liar, or coward. I have concentrated the wickedness which other men spread over a lifetime of petty sins in one great offence.’

‘And that shall be forgiven,’ cried Madge, with a sublime air of conviction. ‘It shall, if you will but repent.’

‘If to wish an act undone is repentance, I have repented for more than two years,’ he answered. ‘Hark, love! that is the luncheon-bell. We must not alarm our friends by our absence. Or stay, I will go down to the dining-room. You had better remain here and rest. Poor agonized head, tender faithful heart, what bitter need of rest for both!’

‘No, dear, I will go down with you,’ Madge answered, firmly. ‘But let me ask one question first, Churchill, and then I will never speak to you more of our secret. That hateful woman—you have pacified her for to-day, but how long will she be satisfied? Is there any fear of new danger?’

‘I can see none, dearest. The woman was satisfied with her lot, and would never have given me any trouble but for this unlucky accident of her son’s attempt last night. I will get the man provided for and sent out of the country, where you shall never hear of him again. The woman is harmless enough, and cares little enough for her son; but that brute instinct of kindred, which even savages feel, made her fight for her cub.’

‘Why did you bring her here, Churchill? Was that wise?’

‘I thought it best so. I thought it wise to have her at hand under my eye, where she could only assail me at close quarters, and where she was not likely to find confederates—where she could have all her desires gratified, and could have no motive for tormenting me.’

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‘It is best, perhaps,’ assented Madge. ‘But it is horrible to have her here.’

‘The Egyptians had a skeleton at their feasts, lest they should forget to make the most of their brief span of carnal pleasures. It is as well to be reminded of the poison in one’s cup of life.’

‘And now go to our guests, Churchill. Your face tells no tale. Say that I am coming almost immediately.’

‘My darling, I fear you are exacting too much from your fortitude.’

‘No, Churchill; I shall begin as I mean to go on. If I were to shut myself up—if I were to give myself time for thought to-day—just at first—I should go mad.’

He went, half unwillingly. She stood for a few moments, fixed to the spot where he had left her, as if lost in some awful dream, and then walked dizzily to the adjoining room, where she tried to wash the ashy pallor from her cheeks with cold spring water. She rearranged her hair, with hands that trembled despite her endeavour to be calm; changed her dress—fastened a scarlet *coque* in her dark hair, and went



down to the dining-room, looking a little wan and fatigued, but not less lovely than she was wont to look. What a mad world it seemed to her when she saw her guests assembled at the oval table, talking and laughing in that easy unreserved way which seems natural at the mid-day meal, when servants are banished, and gentlemen perform the onerous office of carver at the loaded sideboard; when hungry people, just returned from long rambles over hills and banks where the wild thyme grows, or from a desperate croquet match, or a gallop across the moorland, devour a heterogeneous meal of sirloin, perigord pie, clotted cream, fruit, cutlets, and pastry, and drink deeper draughts of that sparkling Devonian cider, better a hundred times than champagne, than they would quite care to acknowledge, if a reckoning were demanded of them.

Everybody seemed especially noisy to-day—talk, flirtation, laughter, made a Babel-like hubbub—and at the end of the table sat the Squire of Penwyn, calm, inscrutable, and no line upon the expansive forehead, with its scanty border of crisp, brown hair, showed the brand of Cain.

## CHAPTER XVII.

‘AH, LOVE, THERE IS NO BETTER LIFE THAN THIS.’

JUSTINA had made a success at the Royal Albert Theatre. The newspapers were tolerably unanimous in their verdict. The more æsthetic and critical journals even gave her their approval, which was a kind of *cachet*. The public, always straightforward and single-minded in their expression of satisfaction, had no doubt about her. She was accepted at once as one of the most popular and promising young actresses of the day—natural yet artistic—free from all trick, unaffected, modest, yet with the impulsive boldness of a true artist, who forgets alike herself and her audience in the unalloyed delight of her art.

A success so unqualified gave the girl extreme pleasure, and elevated Matthew Elgood to a region of bliss which he had never before attained. For the

first time in his life he found himself supplied with ample means for the gratification of desires which, at their widest, came within a narrow limit. The manager of the Royal Albert Theatre had made haste to be liberal, lest other managers, ever on the watch for rising talent, should attempt to lure Justina to their boards by offers of larger reward. He sprang his terms at once from the weekly three guineas, which Matthew had gladly accepted at the outset, to double that amount, and promised further increase if Miss Elgood's second part were as successful as the first.

‘With a very young actress one can never be sure of one's ground,’ he said, diplomatically. ‘The part in “No Cards” just fits your daughter. I've no idea what she may be in the general run of business. I've seen so many promising first appearances lead to nothing.’

‘My daughter has had experience, and tuition from an experienced actor, sir,’ replied Matthew, with dignity. ‘She has a perfect knowledge of her art, and the more you call upon her the better stuff you will get from her. Such a part as that in “No

Cards” is a mere bagatelle for her. Fits her, indeed! It fits her too well, sir. Her genius has no room to expand in it!’

Six guineas—by no means a large income in the eyes of a paterfamilias with a wife, and a servant or two, and a nest-full of small children to provide for, to say nothing of the rent of the nest to pay—seemed wealth to Mr. Elgood, whose ideas of luxury were bounded by a Bloomsbury lodging, a hot dinner every day, and his glass of gin and water mixed with a liberal hand. He expanded himself in this new sunshine, passed his leisure in spelling through the daily papers, escorting his daughter to and from the theatre, and hanging about the green-room, where he told anecdotes of Macready, bragged of Justina’s talents when she was out of the room, and made himself generally agreeable.

That Bloomsbury lodging of Mr. Elgood’s, though located in the shabbier quarter of the parish, seemed curiously near that highly respectable street where Maurice Clissold had his handsome first-floor chambers, so little account did Mr. Clissold make of the distance between the two domiciles. He was



always dropping in at Mr. Elgood's, bringing Justina fresh flowers from the glades of Covent Garden, or a new book, or some new music. She had improved her knowledge of that delightful art during the last two years, and now played and sang sweetly, with taste and expression that charmed the poet.

Before Justina had been many weeks at the Albert Theatre, it became an established fact that Mr. Clissold was to drink tea with Miss Elgood every afternoon. The gentle temptations of the kettle-drum, which he had resisted so bravely in Eton Square, beguiled him here in Bloomsbury, though the simple feast was held on a second floor, with a French mechanic working sedulously at his trade below. Many an hour did Maurice Clissold waste in careless happy talk in that second-floor sitting-room, with its odour of stale tobacco, its shabby old-fashioned furniture, its all-pervading air of poverty and commonness. The room was glorified for him somehow, as he sat by the sunny window sipping an infusion of congou and pekoe out of a blue delf teacup.

One day it struck him suddenly that Justina

ought to have prettier teacups, and a few days afterwards there arrived a set of curious old dragon-china cups and saucers. He had not gone to a china-shop, like a rich man, and ordered the newest and choicest ware that Minton's factory had produced. But he had walked half over London, and peered into all manner of obscure dens in the broker's shop line, till he found something to please him. Old red and blue sprawling monsters of the crocodile species, on thinnest opalescent porcelain, cups and saucers that had been hoarded and cherished by ancient housekeepers, only surrendered when all that life can cling to slipped from death's dull hand. The old fragile pottery pleased him beyond measure, and he carried the cups and saucers off to a cab, packed in a basket of paper shavings, and took them himself to Justina.

‘I don't suppose they are worth very much now-a-days when Oriental china is at a discount,’ he said, ‘and they cost me the merest trifle. But I thought you'd like them.’

Justina was enraptured. Those old cups and saucers were the first present she had ever received

—the first actual gift bestowed out of regard for her pleasure which she could count in all her life ; except the same donor's offerings of books and music.

How good of you !' she said, more than once, and with a look worth three times as many words. Maurice laughed at her delight.

'It was worth my perambulation of London to see you so pleased,' he said.

'What, did you take so much trouble to get them ?'

'I walked a good long way. The only merit my offering has is that I took some pains to find it. I am not a rich man, you know, Justina.'

He called her by her Christian name always, with a certain brotherly freedom that was not unpleasant to either.

'I am so glad of that,' she exclaimed, naïvely.

'Glad I'm not rich ? Why, that's scarcely friendly, Justina.'

'Isn't it ?' But if you were rich you wouldn't come to see us so often, perhaps. Rich people have such hosts of friends.'

'Yes, Croesus has generally a widish circle—not

the best people, possibly, but plenty of them. But I don't think all the wealth of the Indies—the peacock throne of the great Mogul, and so on—would make any difference in my desire to come here. No, Justina, were the chief of the Rothschilds to transfer his balance to my account to-morrow I should drop in all the same for my afternoon refresher, as regularly as five o'clock struck.'

They had talked of literature and poetry, and fully discussed that new poet whose book Justina had wept over, but by no word had Maurice hinted at his identity with the writer. He liked to hear her speculate upon that unknown poet—wondering what he was like—setting up her ideal image of him. One day he made her describe what manner of man she imagined the author of 'A Life Picture ;' but she found it difficult to reduce her fancies to words.

'I cannot compliment you on the clearness of your delineation,' he said. 'I haven't yet arrived at the faintest notion of your ideal poet. If you could compare him to any one we know, it might help me out. Is he like Mr. Flittergilt, the dramatist?'



‘Mr. Flittergilt,’ she cried, contemptuously. ‘Mr. Flittergilt, who is always making bad puns, and talking of his own successes, and telling us that clever remark he made yesterday!’

‘Not like Flittergilt? Has he any resemblance to me, for instance?’

Justina laughed, and shook her head—a very positive shake.

‘No, you are too light-hearted for a poet. You take life too easily. You seem too happy.’

‘In your presence, Justina. You never see me in my normal condition,’ remonstrated Maurice, laughing.

‘No, I cannot fancy the author of that poem at all like you. He is a man who has suffered.’

Maurice sighed.

‘And you think I have never suffered?’

‘He must be a man who has loved a false and foolish woman, and who has been stung to the quick by remorse for his own weakness.’

‘Ah, we are all of us weak once in our lives, and apt to be deceived, Justina. Happy the man who knows no second weakness, and is not twice deceived.’

He said this gravely enough for poet and thinker. Justina looked at him with a puzzled expression.

‘Now you seem quite a different person,’ she said. ‘I could almost fancy you capable of being a poet. I know there are glimpses of poetry in your talk sometimes.’

‘When I talk to you, Justina. Some people have an influence that is almost inspiration. All manner of bright thoughts come to me when you and I are together.’

‘That cannot be true,’ she said. ‘It is you who bring the bright thoughts to me. Consider how ignorant I am, and how much you know—all the great world of poetry, of which so many doors are barred against me. You read Goethe and Schiller. You go into that solemn temple where the Greek poets live in their strange old world. When you took me to the museum the other day, you pointed out all the statues, and talked of them as familiarly as if they had been the statues of your own friends. While I, who have hardly a schoolgirl’s knowledge of French, cannot even read that Alfred de Musset of whom you talk so much.’

‘You know the language in which Shakespeare wrote. You have all that is noblest and grandest in human literature in your hand when you take up that calf-bound, closely printed, double-columned volume yonder, from the old Chiswick press. I think an English writer who never read anything beyond his Bible and his Shakespeare would have a nobler style than the man of widest reading, who had not those two books in his heart of hearts. Other poets are poets. That one man was the god of poetry. But we will read some of De Musset’s poems together, Justina, and I will teach you something more than a schoolgirl’s French.’

After this it became an established thing for Maurice and Justina to read together for an hour or so, just as it was an established thing for Maurice to drop in at tea-time. He made his selections from De Musset discreetly, and then passed on to Victor Hugo ; and thus that more valuable part of education which begins when a schoolgirl has been ‘finished’ was not wanting to Justina. Never was a pupil brighter or more intelligent. Never master more interested in his work.

Matthew Elgood looked on, not unapprovingly. In the first place, he was a man who took life lightly, and always held to the gospel text about the day and the evil thereof. He had ascertained from good-natured Mr. Flittergilt that Maurice Clissold had an income of some hundreds per annum, and was moreover 'the scion of a good old family. About the good old family Matthew cared very little; but the income was an important consideration, and assured of that main fact, he saw no harm in the growing intimacy between Justina and Maurice.

'It's on the cards for her to do better, of course,' reflected Mr. Elgood; 'actresses have married into the peerage before to-day, and no end of them have married bankers and heavy mercantile swells. But, after all, Justina isn't the kind of beauty to take the world by storm; and this success of hers may be only a flash in the pan. I haven't much confidence in the duration of this blessed new school of acting, these drawing-room comedies, with their 'how-d'ye-do, and won't-you-take-a-chair' dialogue. The good old heavy five-act drama will have its turn by and



by, when the public is tired of this milk and water. And Justina has hardly physique enough for the five-act drama. It might be a good thing to get her comfortably married if I was quite clear about my own position.'

That was an all-important question. Justina single and on the stage meant, at a minimum, six guineas a week at Mr. Elgood's disposal. The girl handed her salary over to the paternal exchequer without a question, and was grateful for an occasional pound or two towards the replenishment of her scanty wardrobe.

Mr. Elgood lost no time in trying to arrive at Maurice's ideas upon this subject.

'It's a hard thing for a man when he outlives his generation,' he remarked, plaintively, one Sunday evening when Maurice had dropped in and found the comedian alone, Justina not having yet returned from evening service at St. Pancras. 'Here am I, in the prime of life, with all my faculties in their full vigour, laid up in port, as useless a creature as if I were a sheer hulk, like poor Tom Bowling—actually dependent upon the industry of a girl! There's some-

thing degrading in the idea. If it were not for Justina, I'd accept an engagement for the heavies at the lowest slum in London, roar my vitals out in three pieces a night, rather than eat the bread of dependence. But Justina won't have it. "I want you to bring me home from the theatre of a night, father," she says. And that's an argument I can't resist. The streets of London are no place for unprotected innocence after dark, and cabs are an expensive luxury. Yet it's a bitter thing to consider that if Justina were to marry I should have to go to the workhouse.'

'Hardly, if she married an honest man, Mr. Elgood,' replied Maurice. 'No honest man would take your daughter away from you without making some provision for your future.'

'Well, I *have* looked at it in that light,' said Matthew, reflectively, as if the question had thus dimly presented itself before him. 'I think an honest man wouldn't feel it quite the right thing to take away my bread-winner, and leave me to spend my declining days in want and misery. Yet, as Shakespeare has it, "Age is unnecessary." "Super-

fluous lags the veteran on the stage." "*To have done* is to hang—

“Quite out of fashion, like a rusty nail,  
In monumental mockery.”

‘Be assured, Mr. Elgood, that if your daughter marries a man who really loves her, your age will not be uncared for.’

‘I do not wish to be a burden upon my child,’ pursued the actor, tearfully.

His second tumbler of gin and water was nearly emptied by this time.

‘A hundred and four pounds per annum—two pounds a week—secured to me, would give me all I ask of luxury; my lowly lodging, say in May’s Court, St. Martin’s Lane, or somewhere between Blackfriars Bridge and the Temple; my rasher or my bloater for breakfast, my beefsteak for dinner; and my modest glass of gin and water hot, to soothe the tired nerves of age. These, and an occasional ounce of tobacco, are all the old man craves.’

‘Your desires are very modest, Mr. Elgood.’

‘They are, my dear boy. I would bear the pang of severance from my sweet girl, if I saw her ascend

to a loftier sphere, and keep my lowly place without repining. But I should like the two pounds a week made as certain as the law of the land could make it.'

This was a pretty clear declaration of his views, and having thus expressed himself, Mr. Elgood allowed life to slip on pleasantly, enjoying his comfortable little two o'clock dinners, and his afternoon glass of gin and water, and dozing in his easy chair, while Maurice and Justina read or talked, only waking at five o'clock when the dragon teacups made a cheerful clatter, and Justina was prettily busy with the task of tea-making.

Even the old common lodging-house sitting-room began by and by to assume a brighter and more homelike air. A vase of choice flowers, a row of books neatly arranged on the old-fashioned side-board, a Bohemian glass inkstand, clean muslin covers tacked over the faded chintz chair-backs—small embellishments by which a woman makes the best of the humblest materials. The dragon china tea-service was set out on the chiffonier top when not in use, and made the chief ornament of the



room. Composition statuettes of Shakespeare and Dante, which Maurice had bought from an itinerant image-seller, adorned the chimney-piece, whence the landlady's shepherd and shepherdess were banished.

In a scene so humble, in a circle so narrow, Maurice spent some of the happiest hours of his life. He remembered Cavendish Square sometimes with a pang, the shadowy drawing-room at twilight, the flower-screened balcony, so pleasant a spot to linger in when the lamps were lighted in the square below, and the long vista of Wigmore Street converged to a glittering point, and the moon rose above the gloomy roof of Cavendish House—hours of happiness as unalloyed—dreams that were over, days that were gone. And he asked himself whether this second birth of joy was a delusion and a snare like the first.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

‘LOVE IS A THING TO WHICH WE SOON CONSENT.’

MAURICE CLISSOLD had not forgotten that entry in the register at Seacomb Church, and one afternoon, when Matthew, Justina, and he were cosily seated at the clumsy old lodging-house table drinking tea, he took occasion to refer to his rambles in Cornwall, and his exploration of the little out-of-the-way market town.

‘I should fancy you children of Thespis must have found life rather difficult at such a place as Seacomb,’ he said. ‘Dramatic art must be rather out of the line of those Nonconformist miners. I saw three Dissenting chapels in the small town, one of them being the very building which was once the theatre.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Elgood, with a thoughtful look, ‘we had a bad time of it at Seacomb. My poor

wife was ill, and if it hadn't been for the kindness of the people we lodged with—well, we might have had a closer acquaintance with starvation than any man cares to make. There's no such touchstone for the human heart as distress, and no man knows the goodness of his fellow-men till he has sounded the lowest deep of misery.'

'You [had a child christened at Seacomb, had you not, Mr. Elgood?' asked Maurice.

The comedian looked up with a startled expression.

'How did you know that?' he asked.

'I was turning over the parish register, looking for another entry, when I stumbled across the baptism of a child of yours, whose name was not Justina. I thought perhaps Justina was an assumed name, and that the infant christened at Seacomb was Miss Elgood, as the age seemed to correspond.'

'No,' replied Matthew, hurriedly. 'That infant was an elder sister of Justina's. She died at six weeks old.'

'Why, father,' exclaimed Justina, 'you never told me that you lost a child at Seacomb. I did not even

know I ever had a brother or sister. I thought I was your only child.’

‘The only one to live beyond infancy, my dear. Why should I trouble you with the remembrance of past sorrows? We have had cares enough without raking up dead-and-gone griefs.’

‘Was your wife a Cornish woman, Mr. Elgood?’ asked Maurice.

‘No; she was born within the sound of Bow bells, poor soul. Her father was a bookbinder in Clerkenwell. She had a pretty voice, and a wonderful ear for music; and some one told her she would do very well on the stage. Her home was dull and poor, and she felt she ought to earn her living somehow. So she began to act at a little amateur theatre near Coldbath Fields, and having a bright pretty way with her, she got a good deal of notice, and was offered an engagement to play small singing parts at Sadler’s Wells. I was a member of the stock company there at the time, and her pretty little face and her pretty little ways turned my stupid head somehow, and I told myself that two salaries thrown into one would go further than they



would divided; never considering that managers would want to strike a bargain with us—lump us together on the cheap—when we were married; or that when two people are earning no salary it's harder for two to live than one. Well, we married, and lived a hard life afterwards; but I was true to my poor girl, and fond of her to the last; and when hunger was staring us in the face we were not all unhappy.'

'Justina is like her mother, I suppose,' said Maurice, 'as she doesn't at all resemble you?'

'No,' replied Matthew, 'my wife was a pretty woman, but not in Justina's style.'

'What made you hit upon such an out-of-the-way name as Justina? Mind, I like the name very much, but it is a very uncommon one.'

Mr. Elgood looked puzzled.

'I dare say it was a fancy of my wife's,' he said. 'But I really don't recollect anything about it.'

'I'll tell you why I ask the question,' pursued Maurice. 'While I was in Cornwall, staying at a farm called Borcel End, I came across the name.'

The comedian almost dropped his teacup.

‘ Borcel End !’ he exclaimed, ‘ you were at Borcel End ?’

‘ Yes. You know the place, it seems. But that’s hardly strange, since you lived so long at Seacomb. Did you know the Trevanards ?’

‘ No, I only knew the farm from having it pointed out to me once when a friend gave me a drive across the moor in his dog-cart. A queer, out-of-the-way place. What could have taken you there ?’

‘ It was something in the way of an adventure,’ replied Maurice, and then proceeded to relate his experience on that midsummer afternoon among the Cornish hills.

He touched lightly upon his visit to Penwyn Manor House, knowing that this might be a painful subject for Justina. But she showed a warm interest in his story.

‘ You saw *his* house,’ she said, ‘ the old Manor House he told me about that night at Eborsham. Oh, how like the memory of a dream it seems when I think of it ! I should like so much to see that place.’

‘ You shall see it some day, Justina, if—if you

will let me show it you,' said Maurice, stumbling a little over the last part of the sentence. 'It is strange that you should be twice associated with that remote corner of the land, once in your birth, a second time in poor James Penwyn's devotion to you.'

'It is very strange, sir,' said the comedian, solemnly, and then with his grand Shakesperian manner continued,—

“ ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.’ ”

'It was at Borcel End I heard the name of Justina,' said Maurice, going back to the subject most interesting to him. 'There is an old picture there, a portrait of the present proprietor's grandmother, whose name was Justina.'

'Is the old grandmother living still?' asked Matthew, suddenly.

'What, blind old Mrs. Trevanard? Yes, she is still living. But you said you did not know the Trevanards.'

'Only by repute. I heard people talk about them. Rather a curious family, I fancy.'

‘In some respects,’ answered Maurice, puzzled by the comedian’s manner. It seemed as if he were affecting to know less about the family at Borcel End than he really knew. Yet why should he conceal so simple a circumstance as his acquaintance with the Trevanards?

When Maurice and Justina were alone together for a short time next day, the girl questioned her companion about his visit to Penwyn Manor.

‘I want you to describe the old place,’ she said. ‘I cannot think of it without pain. Yet I like to hear of it. Please tell me all about it.’

Maurice obeyed, and gave a detailed description of the grave old mansion, as he had seen it that summer afternoon.

‘How happy he would have been there!’ said Justina. ‘How bright and fair that young life would have been! I am not thinking of my own loss,’ she said, as if in answer to an unspoken question of Maurice’s. ‘I never forgot what you said about unequal marriages that evening at Eborsham, when you came in and found me in my grief, and spoke some hard truths to me. I felt afterwards



that you were wiser than I ; that all you said was just and true. I should have been a basely selfish woman if I had taken advantage of his foolish impulsive offer—if I had let the caprice of a moment give colour to a life. But believe me, when I let myself love him, I had no thought of his worldly wealth. It was his bright kind nature that drew me to him. No one had ever spoken to me as he spoke. No one had ever praised me before. It was a childish love I gave him, perhaps, but' it was true love, all the same.'

'I believe that, Justina. I believed it then when I saw you, little more than a child, so faithfully sorry for my poor friend's fate. If I had known you better in those days I should not have called his love foolish. I should never have opposed his boyish fancy. I look back now at my self-assertive wisdom, and it seems to me a greater folly than James Penwyn's unreasoning love.'

'You must not say that,' remonstrated Justina gently, 'all that you said was spoken well and wisely ; and if Providence had spared him, and if

he had married me, he would have been ashamed of his actress-wife.’

‘I doubt it, Justina. A man must be hard to please who could be ashamed of you.’

‘I suppose it is very wicked of me,’ said Justina, after a brief silence, ‘but I cannot help grudging those people their happiness in *his* house. It makes me angry when I think of that cousin—Mr. Churchill Penwyn—who gained so much by James’s death. I remember his cold calm face as I saw it at the inquest. There was no sorrow in it.’

‘He could hardly be supposed to be sorry. He and James had seen very little of each other; and James’s death lifted him at a bound from poverty to wealth.’

‘Yes, I can never think of him without remembering that. He gains so much. The murderer with his brutal greed of gain little thought that he was helping another man to fortune—a man who in the evil wish may have shared his guilt.’

‘You have no right to say that, Justina.’

‘It is unjust, perhaps, but I cannot be temperate when I think of James Penwyn’s murder. Nobody thought of interrogating the man who profited so much by his death. You were suspected because you were not at your inn that night; but no one asked where Mr. Churchill Penwyn spent the night of the murder.’

‘There was no ground for suspecting him.’

‘There was the one fact that he was the only gainer by the crime. He should have been made to prove himself innocent. And now he is happy, proud of his usurped position.’

‘So far as one man can judge another man’s life, Churchill Penwyn seems to me completely happy. His wife is a woman in a thousand, and devoted to him; but I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to her some day, perhaps, Justina.’

‘Do not think of such a thing. I could never regard Churchill Penwyn as a friend. I hope never to see him again.’

Maurice Clissold saw that this feeling about James Penwyn’s successor was deeply rooted, and

he argued the question no further. He was too happy in Justina's society to dwell long upon discordant notes. They had so much to talk about, small as was the actual world in which they had mutual interest. Maurice had undertaken to show all the glories of London to the girl whose life hitherto had been spent in small provincial towns. Justina had ample leisure for sight-seeing, for Mr. Flittergilt's original comedy proved an honest success, and there was no new piece yet in rehearsal at the Royal Albert Theatre. Nor had Mr. Elgood, comedian, any prudish notions about the proprieties, which might have hindered his daughter's enjoyment of picture galleries and museums, abbeys and parks. He did not care for sight-seeing himself; for his love of art, he confessed honestly, was not strong enough to counterbalance certain gouty symptoms in his feet, which made prolonged standing a fatigue to him.

‘Let me enjoy my pipe and my newspaper, and let Justina see the pictures and crockery,’ he said, with reference to the South Kensington Museum. So the two young people went about



together as freely as if they had been brother and sister, and spent many a happy hour among the national art treasures, or in Hyde Park, in whose deserted alleys autumn's first leaves were falling.

Mr. Clissold went less and less to his clubs, and became, as it were, a dead letter in the minds of his friends.

One man suggested that Clissold must be writing a novel. Another opined that Clissold had fallen in love.

In the meanwhile Clissold was perfectly happy after his own fashion. Never had his mind been more serene—never had his verse flowed clearer in those quiet night hours which he gave to the Muses; never had the notes of his lyre rung out with a fuller melody. He was writing a poem to succeed the 'Life Picture,' a romance in verse, calculated to be as popular with Mudie's subscribers as his first venture had been. He soared to no empyrean heights of metaphysical speculation, but in strong melodious verse, with honest force and passion, told his story of human joys and human sorrows, human loves and human losses.

It pleased him to hear Justina praise the ‘Life Picture,’ pleased him to think that he would be exalted in her eyes were she to know him as its author. But it pleased him still better to keep his secret, to hear her frank expression of opinion, and leave her free to form her ideal fancy of the poet.

‘The prize I seek to win must be won by myself alone,’ he thought. ‘My literary work is something outside myself. I will not be valued for that.’

One Sunday, that being Justina’s only disengaged evening, Maurice persuaded Mr. Elgood to bring his daughter to dine with him in his bachelor quarters.

‘I want to show you my books,’ he said to Justina. ‘Collecting them has been my favourite amusement for the last five years, and I think it may interest you to see them.’

Justina was delighted at the idea. Mr. Elgood foresaw something special in the way of dinner, perhaps a bottle or two of champagne, so the invitation was accepted with pleasure.

The September evenings were shortening by this

time. They dined by lamplight, and the bachelor's room, with its dark crimson curtains and paper, its heterogeneous collection of pictures, prints, bronzes, and china, looked its best in the mellow light of a pair of Carcel lamps. The inner room was lined from floor to ceiling with books, handsomely bound most of them ; for Mr. Clissold devoted all his superfluous cash to books and bookbinding. To this study and sanctum the party adjourned for coffee and dessert, and while Mr. Elgood did ample justice to a bottle of old port, Maurice showed Justina his favourite authors, and expatiated on the beauty of wide margins. Innocent, happy hours ; yes, every whit as happy as those days of delusion in Cavendish Square. And all this time there were all manner of distinguished people anxious to be introduced to Miss Elgood ; Richmond and Greenwich dinners without number which she might have eaten had she been so minded ; diamonds, } broughams, sealskin jackets, pug-dogs, all the glories of existence ready to be laid at her feet.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### SORROW AUGMENTETH THE MALADY.

THIS happy easy-going life of Maurice Clissold's was suddenly disturbed by a letter from Martin Trevanard. Some time had elapsed without any communication from the young man when this letter arrived, but Maurice, in his new happiness, had been somewhat forgetful of his Cornish friend. He felt a touch of remorse as he read the letter.

‘Things have been going altogether wrong here,’ wrote Martin. ‘I don’t mean in the way of worldly prosperity. We have had a first-rate harvest, and a good year in all respects. But I am sorry to say my mother’s health has been declining for some time. She has been unable to attend to the house, and things get out of gear without her. My father has grown moody and unhappy, and, I’m afraid, puts a dash of brandy into his cider oftener than is good



for him. Muriel is much the same as usual, and the good old grandmother holds out bravely. It is my mother gives me most uneasiness. I feel convinced that she has something on her mind. I have sometimes thought that her trouble is in some way connected with poor Muriel. I only wish you were here. Your clearer mind might understand much that is dark to me. If it were not asking too much from your friendship, I would willingly beg you to come down here for a week or two. It would do me more good than I can express to see you.'

Maurice's answer to this appeal was prompt and brief.

'DEAR MARTIN,—I shall be at Borcel End, all things going well, to-morrow night.

'Yours always,

'M. C.'

It was a hard thing for him to leave town just now. There was his new poem, which had all the charm and freshness of a composition recently begun. Little chance for him to continue his work at Borcel, with Martin always at his elbow, and the family

troubles and family secrets on his shoulders. And then there was Justina—his afternoon cup of tea in the second-floor parlour—all his new hopes and fancies, which had grouped themselves around the young actress, like the Loves and Graces round Venus, in an allegorical ceiling by Lely or Kneller. But friendship with Maurice Clissold being something more than a name, he felt that he could do no otherwise than hasten to his friend's relief. So he took his farewell cup of tea out of the dragon china, and departed by an early express next morning, after promising Justina to be away as brief a span as possible.

Borcel End looked very much as when he had first seen it, save that the warm glow of summer had faded from the landscape, and that the old farmhouse had a gloomy look in the autumn dusk. Maurice had chartered a vehicle at Seacomb station, and driven five miles across country, a wild moorland district, made awful by a yawning open shaft here and there, marking the place of an abandoned mine.

The glow of the great hall fire shining through

the latticed windows was the only cheerful thing at Borcel. All the rest of the long rambling house was dark.

Martin received his friend at the gate.

‘This is good of you, Clissold,’ he said, as Maurice alighted. ‘I feel ashamed of my selfishness in asking you to come to such a dismal place as this; but it will do me a world of good to have you here. I’ve told my mother you were coming for a fortnight’s ramble among the moors. It wouldn’t do for her to know the truth.’

‘Of course not. But as to Borcel being a dismal place, you know that I never found it so.’

‘Ah, you have never lived here,’ said Martin, with a sigh; ‘and then you’ve the family up at the Manor to enliven the neighbourhood for you. There’s always plenty of cheerfulness there.’

‘And how is Mr. Penwyn going on? Is he getting popular?’

‘He ought to be, for he has done a great deal for the neighbourhood. You’ll hardly recognise the road between here and the Manor when you drive there. But I don’t believe the Squire will ever be

as popular as Mrs. Penwyn. The people idolize her. But they seem to have a notion that whatever the Squire does is done more for his own advantage than the welfare of his tenants. And yet, take him for all in all, there never was a more liberal landlord.'

Martin was carrying his friend's small portmantau to the porch as he talked. Having deposited that burden, he ran back and told the driver to take his horse round to the stables, and to go round to the kitchen afterwards for his own supper. This hospitable duty performed, Martin opened the door, and ushered Maurice into the family sitting-room.

There sat the old grandmother in her accustomed corner, knitting the inevitable grey stocking which was always in progress under those swift fingers. There, in an arm-chair by the fire, propped up with pillows, sat the mistress of the homestead, sorely changed since Maurice had last seen her. The keen dark eyes had all their old brightness; nay, looked brighter from the pallor of the shrunken visage; the high cheek-bones, the square jaw, were more sharply outlined than of old; and the hand which



the invalid extended to Maurice—that honest hard-working hand, which had once been coarse and brown—was now white and thin.

Michael Trevanard sat at the opposite side of the hearth, with a pewter tankard, a newspaper, and a long clay pipe on the square oak table at his elbow. These idle autumn evenings were trying to the somewhat mindless farmer, to whom all the world of letters afforded no further solace than the county paper, or an occasional number of the *Field*.

‘I am sorry to see you looking so ill, Mrs. Trevanard,’ Maurice said kindly.

‘I’ve had a bad time of it this year, Mr. Clissold,’ she answered. ‘I had an attack of ague and low fever in the spring, and it left a cough that has stuck to me ever since.’

‘I hope my coming here while you are an invalid, will not be troublesome to you.’

‘No,’ answered Mrs. Trevanard, with a sigh, ‘I’ve got used to the notion of things being in a muddle; and neither Michael nor Martin seem to mind; so it doesn’t much matter that the house is

neglected. I've been obliged to take a second girl, and the two between them make more dirt than ever they clean up. Your old room's been got ready for you, Mr. Clissold ; at least I told Martha to clean it thoroughly, early this morning, and light a good fire this afternoon ; so I suppose it's all right. But you might as well make up your mind that the wind was always to blow from one quarter, as that a girl would do her duty when your eyes are off her. If I had a daughter, now, a handy young woman to look after the house——'

She turned her head upon her pillow with a shuddering sigh. That thought was too bitter.

'My dear Mrs. Trevanard,' cried Maurice, cheerfully, 'I feel assured that the room will be—well not so nice as you would have made it perhaps, but quite clean and comfortable.'

He took his seat by the hearth, and entered into conversation with the master of the house, who seemed cheered by the visitor's arrival.

'And pray what's doing up in London, Mr. Clissold?' Michael Trevanard asked, as if he took the keenest interest in metropolitan affairs.

Maurice told him the latest stirring events—wars and rumours of wars, reviews, royal marriages in contemplation—to which the farmer listened with respectful attention, feeling these facts as remote from his life as if they had occurred in the East Indies.

He, on his part, told Maurice all that had been stirring at Penwyn; amongst other matters that curious circumstance of the attempted burglary, and Mr. Penwyn's lenity towards the offender.

'I'm rather surprised to hear that,' said Maurice. 'I should not have thought the Squire a particularly easy-going person.'

'No, he can be stern enough at times,' answered the farmer. 'That business up at the justice-room caused a good bit of talk. If it had been one of us, folks said, Squire Penwyn wouldn't have let go his grip like that. They couldn't understand why he should be so lenient just because the man was the son of his lodge-keeper. It would have seemed more natural for him to get rid of the whole lot altogether, for they're a set of vagabonds to be about a gentleman's place. That girl Elspeth,

who brought you here, is always robbing the orchards and hen-roosts about the neighbourhood. She's a regular pest to the farmers' wives.'

'That curious-looking woman is still at the lodge, then?' asked Maurice.

'Yes, she's still there.'

'Perhaps it was Mrs. Penwyn who interceded for the son.'

'Well, it was a curious business altogether,' answered the farmer. 'Mrs. Penwyn and the woman has a talk together in a room to themselves, and then Mrs. Penwyn comes back to the justice-room looking as white as a corpse, and says a few words to her husband, and on that he talks over Mr. Tresillian, and then Mr. Tresillian lets the vagabond off with a reprimand. Now why Mrs. Penwyn should intercede for the woman's son I can't understand, for it's well known, through Mrs. Penwyn's own maid having talked about it, that the Squire's lady can't endure the woman, and is vexed with her husband for keeping such trash on his premises.'

'I dare say there's something more in it than any of us Cornish folks are likely to find out,' said



Mrs. Trevanard. 'The Penwyns were always a secret underhanded lot; smooth on the outside; as fair as whitened sepulchres, and as foul within.'

'Come, Bridget, you're prejudiced against them. You always have been, I think. It isn't fair to speak ill of those that have been good landlords to us.'

'Haven't we been good tenants? We're even there, I think.'

The maid-servant came in to lay the supper-table, Mrs. Trevanard's watchful eyes following the girl's every movement. A good substantial supper had been prepared for the traveller, but the old air of comfort seemed to have deserted the homestead, Maurice thought. The sick wife, with that unmistakable prophetic look in her face, the forecast shadow of coming death, gave a melancholy air to the scene. The blind old grandmother, sitting apart in her corner, looked like a monument of age and affliction. The farmer himself had the heavy dulness of manner which betokens a too frequent indulgence in alcohol. Martin was spasmodically gay, as if determined to enjoy the society of his friend; but

care had set its mark on the bright young face, and he was in no wise the Martin of two years ago.

Maurice retired to his bedroom soon after supper, conducted by Martin. The apartment was unchanged in its dismal aspect; the dingy old furniture loomed darkly through the dusk, Martin's one candle making only an oasis of light in the desert of gloom.

The memory of his first night at Borcel End was very present to Maurice Clissold as he seated himself by the hearth, where the fire had burned black and dull.

'Poor Muriel,' he thought, 'what a dreary chamber for youth and beauty to inhabit! And in a fatal hour the girl's first love dream came to illumine the gloom—sweet delusive dream, bringing pain along with it, and inextinguishable regret.

Martin set down the candle on the dressing-table, and poked the fire vehemently.

'Poor mother's right,' he said. 'Those girls never do anything properly now she isn't able to follow them about. I told Phœbe to be sure to have a bright fire to light up this cheerless old den,

and she has left nothing but a mass of smouldering coal.'

'Never mind the fire, Martin. Sit down like a good fellow, and tell me all your troubles. Your poor mother looks very ill.'

'So ill that the doctor gives us no hope of her ever getting better. Poor soul, she's going to leave us. Heaven only knows how soon. She's been a good faithful wife to father, and a tender mother to me, and a good mistress and a faithful servant in all things, so far as I can tell. Yet I'm afraid there's something on her mind—something that weighs heavy. I've seen many a token of secret care, since she's been ill and sitting quietly by the fire, thinking over her past life.'

'And you imagine that her trouble is in some way connected with your sister?'

'I don't see what else it can be. That's the only unhappiness we've ever had in our lives. All the rest has been plain sailing enough.'

'Have you questioned your mother about her anxieties?' asked Maurice.

'Many times. But she has always put me off

with some impatient answer. She has never denied that she has secret cares, but when I have begged her to trust me or my father, she has turned from me peevishly. "Neither of you could help me," she has told me. "What is the use of talking of old sores when there's no healing them?"

'An unanswerable question,' said Maurice.

'You remember what you said to me about poor Muriel the day you left Borcel? Well, those words of yours made a deep impression upon me, not so much at the time as afterwards. I thought over all you had said, and it seemed to grow clear to me that there was something sadder about my poor sister's story than had ever come to my knowledge. She had not been quite fairly used, perhaps. Things had been hushed up and hidden for the honour of her family, and she had been the victim of the family respectability. My mother's one fault is pride—pride in the respectability of the Trevanards. She doesn't want to be on a level with her superiors, or to be thought anything better than a yeoman's wife, but her strong point has been the family credit. "There are no people in Cornwall more looked up



to than the Trevanards.' I can remember hearing her say that, as soon as I can remember anything; and I believe she would make any sacrifice of her own happiness to maintain that position. It is just possible that she may have sacrificed the peace of others.'

'I agree with you there, Martin. Whatever wrong has been done, great or small, has been done for the sake of the good old name.'

'Now it struck me,' continued Martin, earnestly, 'that although my mother cannot be persuaded to confide in me, or in my father, who has been a little dull of late, poor soul, she might bring herself to trust you. I know that she respects you, as a clever man, and a man of the world. You live remote from this little corner of the earth where the Trevanards are of importance. She would feel less pain perhaps in trusting you with a family secret than in telling it to her own kith and kin. You would go away carrying the secret with you, and if there were any wrong to be righted, as I fear there must be, you might right it without giving rise to scandal. This is what I have thought—foolishly, perhaps.'

‘Indeed, no, Martin, I see no folly in your idea ; and if I can persuade your mother to trust me, depend upon it I will.’

‘She knows you are a gentleman, and might be willing to trust in your honour, where she would doubt any commoner person.’

‘We’ll see what can be done,’ answered Maurice, hopefully. ‘Your poor sister lives apart from you all, I suppose, in the old way?’

‘Yes,’ replied the young man, ‘and I fear it’s a bad way. Her wits seem further astray than ever. When I meet her now in the hazel copse, where she is so fond of wandering, she looks scared and runs away from me. She sings to herself sometimes of an evening, as she sits by the fire in grandmother’s room. I hear her, now and then, as I pass the window, singing some old song in her sad, sweet voice, just as she used to sing me to sleep years ago. But I think she hardly ever opens her lips to speak.’

‘Does she ever see her mother?’

‘That’s the saddest part of all. For the last year my mother hasn’t dared go near her. Muriel

took to screaming at the sight of her, as if she was going into a fit; so, since then, mother and she have hardly ever met. It's hard to think of the dying mother, so near her only daughter, and yet completely separated from her.'

'It's a sad story altogether, Martin,' said Maurice, 'and a heavy burden for your young life. If I can do anything to lighten it, be sure of my uttermost help. I am very glad you sent for me. I am very glad you trust me.'

On this the two young men shook hands and parted for the night, Martin much cheered by his friend's coming.

No intrusion disturbed the traveller's rest. He slept soundly after his long journey, and awoke to hear farmyard cocks crowing in the sunshine, and to remember that he was more than two hundred miles away from Justina.

## CHAPTER XX.

‘BUT OH! THE THORNS WE STAND UPON!’

‘MR. CLISSOLD spent the morning sauntering about the farm, and lounging in one of the hill-side meadows with Martin. The young man was depressed by the sense of approaching calamity; and the thought of parting with his mother, who had been more tender to him than to any one else in the world, was a bitter grief not to be put aside. But he did his best to keep his sorrow to himself, and to be an agreeable companion to his friend; while Maurice, on his side, tried to beguile Martin to forgetfulness, by cheery talk of that wide busy world in which the young Cornishman longed to take his place.

‘I shall have my liberty soon enough,’ said Martin, with a sigh. ‘I could not leave Borcel during my mother’s lifetime, for I knew it would



grieve her if I deserted the old homestead. But when she is gone the tie will be broken. Father can rub on well enough without me, if I find him an honest bailiff to take my place. He can afford to sit down and rest now, and take things easily; for he's a rich man, though he and mother always make a secret of it. And I can run down here once or twice a year, to see how things are going on. Yes, I shall certainly go to London after my poor mother's death. Borcel would be hateful to me without her. And if you can get me into a merchant's office, I would try my hand at commerce. I am pretty quick at figures.'

'I'll do my best to start you fairly, dear boy, though I have not much influence in the commercial world. I think a year or two in London would do you good, and perhaps reconcile you to your country life afterwards. A little London goes a long way with some people. And now I think I'll walk over to Penwyn, and see how the Squire and his wife are getting on. I shall be back at Borcel by tea-time. Will you come with me, Martin?'

'I should like it of all things, but my mother

sets her face against any intercourse between the two families. She doesn't even like my father to go to the audit dinner. And just now when she's so ill, I don't care to do anything that can vex her. So I'll loaf about at home, while you go up yonder.'

'So be it, then, Martin. I think you're quite right.'

The walk across the moorland was delightful in the late September weather, a fresh breeze blowing off the land, and the Atlantic's mighty waves breaking silver-crested upon the rugged shore.

'If Justina were but here!' thought Maurice, with a longing for that one companion in whose presence he had found perfect contentment—the companion who always understood, and always sympathized—who laughed at his smallest jokelet, for whom his loftiest flight never soared too high. He thought of Justina, mewed up in her Bloomsbury parlour, while he was gazing on that wide ocean, breathing this ethereal air, and he felt as if there were selfishness in his enjoyment of the scene without her.

'Will the day ever come when she and I shall be one, and visit earth's fairest scenes together?' he

wondered. 'Has she forgotten her romantic attachment to my poor friend, and can she give me a whole heart? I think she likes me. I have sometimes ventured to tell myself that she loves me. Yet there is that old memory. She can never give me a love as pure and perfect as that early passion—the firstfruits of her innocent, girlish heart, pure as those vernal offerings which the Romans gave their gods.'

He looked back to that summer day at Eborsham when he had seen the overgrown, shabbily clad girl, sitting in the meadow, with wild flowers in her lap, lifting her pale young face, and looking up at him with her melancholy eyes—eyes which had beheld so little of earth's brightness. Nothing fairer than such a meadow on a summer afternoon.

'I did not know that was my fate,' he said to himself, remembering his critical, philosophical consideration of the group.

Thinking of Justina shortened that moorland walk, the subject being, in a manner, inexhaustible; just that one subject which, in the mind of a lover, has no beginning, middle, or end.

By and by the pedestrian struck into one of Squire Penwyn's new roads, and admired the young trees in the Squire's plantations, and the thickets of rhododendron planted here and there among the stems of Norwegian and Scotch firs. A keeper's or forester's lodge here and there, built of grey stone, gave an air of occupation to the landscape. The neatly kept garden, full of autumn's gaudy flowers; a group of rustic children standing at gaze to watch the traveller.

These plantations wonderfully improved the approach to Penwyn Manor House. They gave an indication of residential estate, as it were, and added importance to the country seat of the Penwyns; the Manor House of days gone by having been an isolated mansion set in a wild and barren landscape. Now-a-days the traveller surveyed these well-kept plantations on either side of a wide high road, and knew that a lord of the soil dwelt near.

Maurice entered the Manor House grounds by the north lodge. He might have chosen a shorter way, but he had a fancy for taking another look at the woman who had first admitted him to Penwyn,



and who had become notorious since then, on account of her son's wrong doing.

The iron gate was shut, but the woman was near at hand, ready to admit visitors. She was sitting on her door-step, basking in the afternoon sunshine. She no longer wore the close white cap in which Maurice had first seen her. To-day her dark hair, with its streaks of grey, was brushed smoothly from her swarthy forehead, and a scarlet handkerchief was tied loosely across her head.

That bit of scarlet had a curious effect upon Maurice Clissold's memory. Two years ago he had vaguely fancied the face familiar. To-day brought back the memory of time and place, the very moment and spot where he had first seen it.

Yes, he recalled the low water meadows, the tow-path, the old red-tiled roofs and pointed gables of Eborsham; the solemn towers of the cathedral, the crook-backed willows on the bank; and youth and careless pleasure personified in James Penwyn.

This lodge-keeper was no other than that gipsy who had prophesied evil about Maurice Clissold's friend. A slight thing, perhaps, and matter for

ridicule, that dark saying about the severed line of life on James Penwyn’s palm ; but circumstances had given a fatal force to the soothsayer’s words.

‘What!’ said Maurice, looking at the woman earnestly as she unlocked the gate, “you and I have met before, my good woman, and far away from here.’

She stared at him with a stolid look.

‘I remember your coming here two years ago,’ she said. ‘That was the first and last time I ever saw you till to-day.’

‘Oh no, it was not—not the first time. Have you forgotten Eborsham, and your fortune-telling days, when you told my friend Mr. Penwyn’s fortune, and talked about a cut across his hand? He was murdered the following day. I should think that event must have impressed the circumstance upon your mind.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ Rebecca Mason answered, doggedly. ‘I never saw you till you came here. I was never at any place called Eborsham.’

‘I cannot gainsay so positive an assertion from a lady,’ said Maurice, ironically ; ‘but all I can say

is, that there is some one about in the world who bears a most extraordinary likeness to you. I hope the fact may never get you into trouble.'

He passed on towards the house, sorely perplexed by the presence of this woman at Mr. Penwyn's gates. He had no shadow of doubt as to her identity. She was the very woman he had seen plying her gipsy trade at Eborsham,—that woman, and no other. And what could have brought her here? Through what influence, by what pretence, had she wormed her way into a respectable household, and acquired so much power that her vagabond son might attempt a burglary with impunity?

The question was a puzzling one, and worried Maurice not a little. He remembered what Mrs. Trevanard had said about there being something in the background, something false and underhanded in the Squire's life. Only the suggestion of a prejudiced woman, of course; but such suggestions make their impression even upon the clearest mind. He remembered Justina's prejudice against the man who had been so great a gainer by James Penwyn's death.

‘Heaven help Churchill Penwyn!’ he thought. ‘It is not a pleasant thing to succeed to a murdered man’s heritage. Let him walk ever so straight, there will be watchful eyes that will see crookedness in all his ways.’

‘It’s a curious business about that gipsy woman, though,’ he went on, after a pause. ‘Does Mr. Penwyn know who she is, I wonder? or has she deceived him as to her character, and traded upon his benevolence? Although he is not much liked here, he has done a good deal that indicates a benevolent mind, and kindly intentions towards his dependents. He may have given that woman her post out of pure charity. I’ll try if I can get to the bottom of the business.’

He drew near the house. Everywhere he saw improvement—everywhere the indication of an all-pervading taste, which had turned all things to beauty. The gardens, whose half-neglected air he remembered, were now in most perfect order. Additions had been made to the house, not important in their character, but in a manner completing the harmony of the picture. And over all there



was a wealth of colour, and varied light and shadow, which would have made most country mansions seem dull and commonplace in comparison with this one.

‘It is Mrs. Penwyn’s taste, no doubt, which has made the place so charming,’ Maurice thought. ‘Happy man to have such a wife. I will think no ill of him, for her sake.’

The aspect of the house impressed Maurice as suggestive of happy domestic life. Grandeur was not the character of the mansion—home-like prettiness rather, a gracious smiling air, which seemed to welcome the stranger.

Maurice entered by an Elizabethan porch, which had been added to the old lobby entrance at one end of the house. The lobby had been transformed into the prettiest little armory imaginable: the dark and shining oak walls, decorated with weapons and shields of the Middle Ages, all old English. This armory opened into a corridor with a row of doors on either side, a corridor which led straight to the hall, now the favourite family sitting-room, and provided with what was known as the ladies’ billiard-table. The billiard-room proper was an

apartment at the other end of the house, with an open Gothic roof, and lighted from the top, a room which Churchill had added to the family mansion.

Here, in the spacious old hall, Maurice found the family and guests assembled after luncheon; Lady Cheshunt enthroned in a luxurious arm-chair, drawn close to the bright wood fire, which pleasantly warmed the autumnal atmosphere; Viola Bellingham deeply engaged in the consideration of whether to play for the white or the red, her own ball having been sent into a most uncomfortable corner by her antagonist, Sir Lewis Dallas; Mrs. Penwyn seated on a sofa by the sunniest window, with the infant heir on her knees, a sturdy fair-haired youngster in a dark blue velvet frock, trying his utmost to demolish a set of Indian chessmen which the indulgent mother had produced for his amusement; Churchill seated near, glancing from an open Quarterly to that pleasing picture of mother and child; two or three young ladies and a couple of middle-aged gentlemen engaged in watching the billiard-players; and finally, Sir Lewis Dallas engaged in watching Viola.

No brighter picture of English home life could be imagined.

Churchill threw down his Quarterly, and rose to offer the unexpected guest a hearty welcome, which Madge as heartily seconded.

‘This time, of course, you have come to stay with us,’ said Mr. Penwyn.

‘You are too good. No. I have put up at my old quarters at Borcel End. But I dare say I shall give you quite enough of my society. I walked over to spend an hour or two, and perhaps ask for a cup of tea from Mrs. Penwyn.’

‘You’ll stop to dinner, surely?’

‘Not this evening, tempting as such an invitation is. I promised Martin Trevanard that I would go back before dark.’

‘You and that young Martin are fast friends, it seems.’

‘Yes. He is a capital young fellow, and I am really attached to him,’ answered Maurice, somewhat absently.

He was looking at Mrs. Penwyn, surprised, nay, shocked, by the change which her beauty had

suffered since he had last seen the proud handsome face, only a few months ago. There was the old brightness in her smile, the same grand carriage of the nobly formed head; but her face had aged somehow. The eyes seemed to have grown larger; the once perfect oval of the cheek had sharpened to a less lovely outline; the clear dark complexion had lost its carnation glow, and that warm golden tinge, which had reminded Maurice of one of De Musset’s Andalusian beauties, had faded to an ivory pallor.

Madge was as kind as ever, and seemed no less gay. Yet Maurice fancied there was a change even in the tone of her voice. It had lost its old glad ring.

The stranger was presented to the guests of the house. The younger ladies received him with something akin to enthusiasm, there being only one eligible young man at Penwyn Manor, and he being hopelessly entangled in the fair Viola’s silken net. Lady Cheshunt asked if Mr. Clissold had come straight from London, and, on being answered in the affirmative, ordered him to sit down by her immediately, and tell her all the news of the metropolis—about that dreadful murder in the Bow Road,



and about the American comedian who had been making people laugh at the Royal Bouffonerie Theatre, and about the new French novel, which the *Saturday Review* said was so shocking that no respectable woman ought to look at it, and which Lady Cheshunt was dying to read.

Maurice stayed for afternoon tea, which was served in the hall, Viola officiating at a Sutherland table, in the broad recess that had once been the chief entrance.

‘So you have abandoned your ancient office, Mrs. Penwyn,’ said Maurice, as he carried the lady of the manor her cup.

‘Madge has not been very strong lately, and has been obliged to avoid even small fatigues,’ answered Churchill, who was standing near his wife’s chair.

‘There is a cloud on the horizon,’ thought Maurice, as he set out on his homeward walk. ‘Not any bigger than a man’s hand, perhaps; but the cloud is there.’

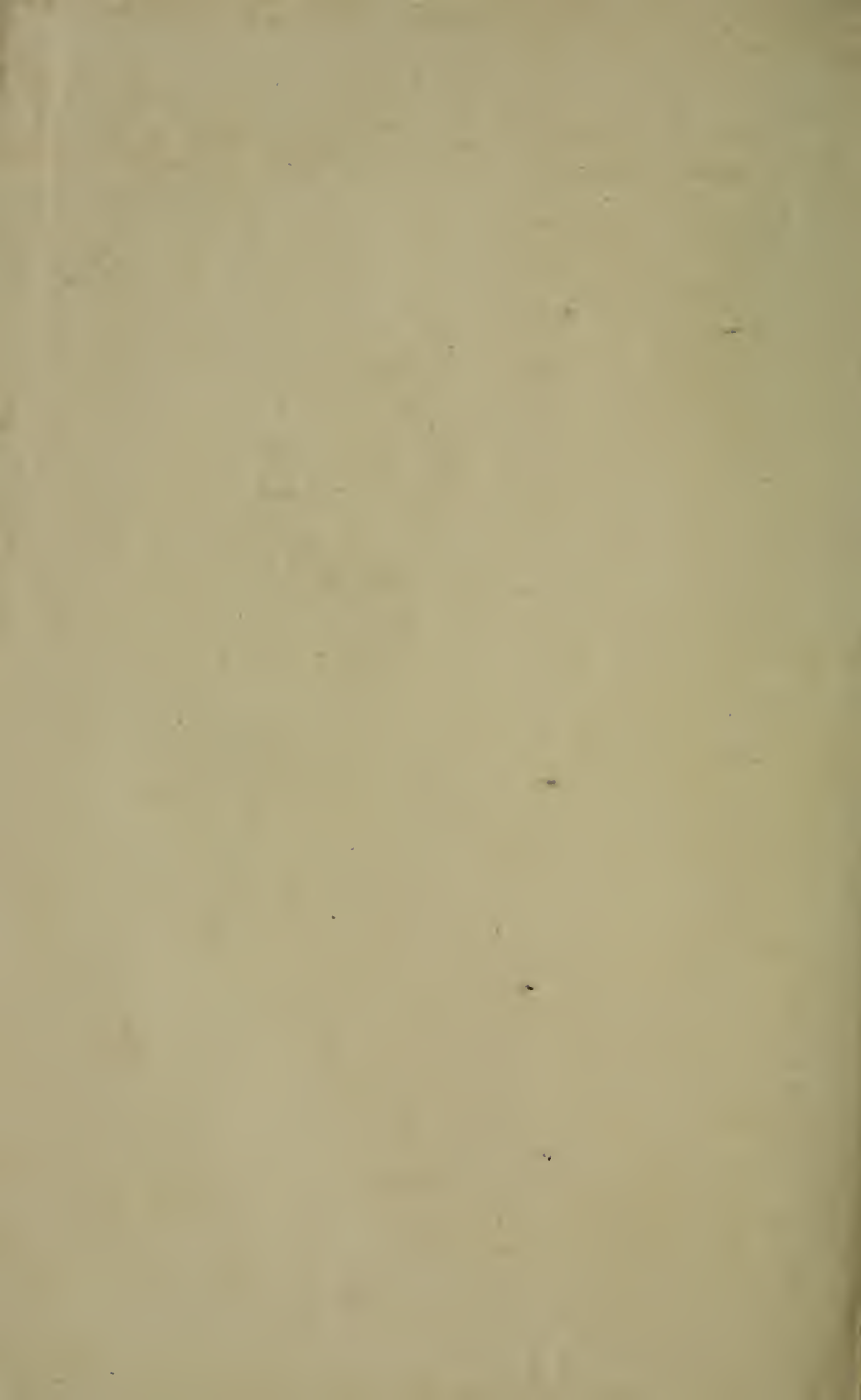
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